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New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Ms. Córdova Soria
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alfassam
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

United Nations peacekeeping operations

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

United Nations peacekeeping operations

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; Lieutenant General Leonard Ngondi, Force Commander of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur; Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck, Force Commander of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; and Lieutenant General Frank Mushyo Kamanzi, Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

Lieutenant General Kamanzi is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Juba.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: It is my pleasure to open the Security Council meeting ahead of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Force Commanders and Heads of Military Components Conference in New York. I will be very brief because this meeting is essentially about hearing the voices of the Force Commanders who are deployed in the field. They are the ones who head the military components of our peacekeeping missions, and they are really best placed to tell us how the mandates negotiated and adopted by the Council are implemented on the ground and about the challenges they face in doing so.

(*spoke in French*)

I would just like to say that the programme that we have organized for the Force Commanders this week will allow them to keep abreast of the important decisions being taken here at Headquarters on peacekeeping in the context of the Security Council, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the Fifth Committee and in our various interactions with Member States. We will also keep them informed of the way in which we perceive progress in the efforts we are making to be more effective and improve the performance of our missions.

The Force Commanders this week will participate in working sessions on the major current priorities, including the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative and our initiatives to improve protection for our colleagues on the ground — our peacekeeping troops — which are initiatives that relate more broadly to issues of performance, as well as the carrying out of the strategic review and other topics linked to the improvement of peacekeeping effectiveness.

(*spoke in English*)

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Force Commanders for their dedication. On behalf of all our colleagues at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, I would like to express my high appreciation not only for the way in which the Force Commanders are contributing to the implementation of their mandates, but also, more specifically, for their very strong engagement in helping us implement our action plan in the field, which is aimed not only at reducing the number of fatalities in peacekeeping, but, more broadly, at improving the performance of peacekeeping. Since we started the action plan, there have been some encouraging developments in the field over the past couple of months. I am very grateful for that. There is still a long way to go, but I am confident that, with the strong support of the Council and the strong engagement of our Force Commanders, we will be able to make a difference in terms of how peacekeeping performs and protects. I look forward to hearing from the Force Commanders.

The President: I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Ngondi.

Lieutenant General Ngondi: With regard to the impact of the security and operational environment on mandate implementation by peacekeeping missions, the environment for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is shaped by five main aspects.

The first aspect is the fact that the Government of the Sudan is robust in exercising its sovereign authority in its territory, and that keeps the armed groups in check. However, while the relationship between the mission and the Government is cordial, the latter often restricts UNAMID's freedom of movement and the inflow of resources and services, contrary to the provisions of the status of forces agreement.

Secondly, the existence of armed groups, inside and outside the territory, that are non-signatories to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur also shape the environment. The leadership of those groups needs to be persuaded to embrace dialogue.

Thirdly, the intercommunal conflicts over natural resources, mainly between herders and farming communities, are another aspect. Land ownership remains at the heart of the Darfur conflict, and a durable solution for peaceful coexistence among different communities can be found only through embracing dialogue as the first step.

Fourthly, banditry and criminality exist owing to poverty, underdevelopment and the absence or inadequacy of law-and-order enforcement capacity. The remedy lies in capacity-building for public institutions and humanitarian and civil society organizations in order to deliver basic services.

Lastly, the proliferation of weapons exacerbates banditry and criminal activities. The ongoing arms-collection campaign by the Government has reduced banditry and criminal activities remarkably. However, the exercise is perceived to be discriminatory. UNAMID encourages the Government to collect illegal arms uniformly.

I will now address specific concerns raised in the concept note of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Force Commanders and Heads of Military Components Conference.

The first is whether the mandate is robust enough. It is opined that the mandate of UNAMID, being a peacekeeping mission, is sufficiently robust to achieve its objectives. The mission has all the relevant components and uses an integrated approach in its conduct of operations, in addition to religiously implementing the action plan proposed in the Santos Cruz report.

The second is whether the mandate is understandable and implementable. The mandate of UNAMID is anchored on four main pillars: namely, the protection of civilians, the delivery of humanitarian aid, mediation between the Government of the Sudan and non-signatories to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and, lastly, assistance in community resolution mechanisms. Those pillars are simple, understandable and implementable, as long as there is commitment and political will on the part of all parties to the conflict, including the interest groups.

That last concerns the support needed from the Security Council to help the mission fulfil its mandate.

First, it is recommended that a transition strategy be embedded in the mandate renewal. Lessons learned from missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire show that a good transition guarantees that gains made are not made in vain.

Secondly, the Government of the Sudan may be persuaded to adhere to the provisions of the status of force agreement and allow UNAMID freedom of movement and unhindered flights in the area of operations.

Lastly, the leadership of the armed groups needs to be persuaded to embrace dialogue.

In conclusion, peacekeeping missions remain important political tools for finding durable solutions to conflicts. Challenges, hazards and security threats emerging in the security and operational environment should be mitigated in order to allow the fulfilment of the mandates, as intimated in Santos Cruz report. UNAMID remains grateful for the support accorded by the Council, to Headquarters and other partners in its endeavour to implement its mandate in Darfur, the Sudan.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Ngondi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Major General Deconinck.

Major General Deconinck: I would have liked to be in Kidal this week to officially and proudly initiate the build-up of the Operational Coordination Mechanism unit. I was in the famous capital of Kidal exactly one year ago. That is just to say that time is passing, but we must be patient.

I am also proud to be at this meeting today and to interact with the Security Council on Mali and on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The Mission in Mali is made up of peacekeepers with great dedication and a commitment to bring peace and stability to the people of Mali. Nevertheless, we are extremely aware that our peacekeepers are making the highest sacrifice to bring lasting peace to Mali. To the many troop-contributing countries from around the world, I would like to express a sincere debt of gratitude for their commitment, and I call for their continued support to peace and stability in Mali.

With that in mind, I believe the way that peacekeeping operations are conducted is shifting. The Santos Cruz report compellingly defines the environment in which we now operate. We owe it to our peacekeepers, both civilian and military, to implement the Action for Peacekeeping, to change our mind-sets and to adapt how we lead at all levels to the new challenges we face. Allow me to share my perspective on the security context.

The capture of the central region town of Kona marked the southernmost advance of the jihadist groups in Mali during the rebellion of 2012-2013. In that connection, the inner Niger delta, to the west of Kona, served as a fortunate natural obstacle to further jihadist movement southward. Last month, a MINUSMA force operation to Kona aimed to deliver security and stability in the face of the insurgent activities of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin terrorist armed groups

Other than by geography, those two events are not directly related — there has not been an enduring jihadist or terrorist presence in Kona since 2013. From 2015, however, terrorist armed groups have steadily re-established themselves in Kona and across the central region, particularly since the founding of the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin organization, at the start of 2017.

I perceive that as an example of a changing security and operational environment. Perhaps more important, I believe we have to recognize the significance of the central region in relation to the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which is at the heart of MINUSMA's mandate.

From the perspective of peacekeeping in a changing security and operational environment, how we understand the current security situation in Mali is as important as what the situation currently is. In a contested security environment, where the force and the civil population are targeted, the attitude of the force and of MINUSMA towards terrorist and insurgent armed groups is put to the test. Understanding the character of the conflict between those groups and the strategy they are waging against us is key to determining what our response should be — within our mandate and our rules of engagement. We have to adapt to the circumstances that define the current challenges.

The north is sparsely populated. There the force remains fully committed to the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to achieving stability in the regions as well as the restoration and deployment of the Malian State. In key population centres, the force, in coordination with the Malian Defence and Security Forces and armed groups compliant with the Peace Agreement, provides security to the local population and to the good offices of the MINUSMA Mission. The force also plays a key role in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process to establish inclusive and representative Malian Defence and Security Forces in the north.

Nevertheless, the north is also the seat of the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin terrorist organization and its many subordinate groups, which actively seek to undermine MINUSMA's efforts to bring about peace and stability. Those groups frequently conduct complex attacks on the force involving improvised explosive devices and indirect fire, giving MINUSMA its reputation as the most dangerous peacekeeping mission in the world. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin attacks on MINUSMA's bases, such as the one last month in Timbuktu, have targeted civilian and military peacekeepers alike. The criminal trafficking networks sustain the activities of the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin groups in the north of Mali, but their regional influence is also evident in the attacks in Ouagadougou earlier this year. The regional dimensions of such attacks call for a regional approach to the crisis in Mali. We also see activity by the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin in Mali's central region as exemplifying a changing security and operational environment, which calls for a robust approach to peacekeeping.

Rightly, MINUSMA has invested in understanding the changing character of the conflict in Mali and the Sahel, but now we have to adapt to that changing security and operational environment in order to support the people and to support peace, stability and the fulfilment of our mandate, pursuant to resolution 2364 (2017). It is in that sense that robust peacekeeping is required. A commitment from the Security Council to Mali must be supported by a number of measures to deliver this new, more robust approach and to provide the necessary means to support the Government of Mali.

As outlined in the Santos Cruz report, we have to change our mindset. The force requires competent leaders and commanders with the right knowledge, skills and experience to lead in a complex security environment. In return, we must decentralize some of our decision-making processes in order to enable them to deliver what we ask of them, in particular the means to ensure a lasting effect on operations.

In complex conflict environments, intelligence analysts must support our commanders with the ability and the means to collect and process all forms of intelligence. We also need to guard more effectively against intelligence collected on our force elements. We must invest in improving the training standards for our military peacekeepers both before and during their missions. We know the challenges they will face and we must ensure they come prepared. Within the force headquarters we have adapted our structure to provide more support to training, and we now need to create mobile training teams to support our contingents and troop-contributing countries.

We must insist on appropriate and universal standards of first-line medical equipment, in conjunction with a mandatory combat casualty care course for all troops. In addition, current United Nations procedures for casualty and medical evacuation need to be reviewed.

In Mali, as in many other peacekeeping missions, airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, helicopters and aircraft are essential force multipliers. MINUSMA's access to the population, for both civilian and military peacekeepers, is greatly constrained by the shortfall in aviation assets.

Furthermore, a robust approach also calls for military components to take greater ownership of their operational logistics — to be able to set priorities, to control military transport assets and to determine convoy composition. In MINUSMA, every convoy has to be considered as a military operation of its own.

Finally, the added value of a multidimensional and integrated mission cannot be overstated. Complex conflict environments call for such missions to confront the multitude of factors needed to address the crisis in Mali, and nowhere more so than in the central region. A multidimensional mission must also include a regional approach to addressing the crisis from all the dimensions, in all countries of the Sahel region. The force is committed to facilitating several missions and to further developing and implementing such effective multidimensional policies to generate the conditions for sustainable peace and security in Mali and for the Malian people.

The President: I thank Major General Deconinck for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Kamanzi.

Lieutenant General Kamanzi: Like my colleagues, I have been asked to provide a perspective on the impact of the changing security and operational environment on United Nations missions and mandates. I would like to start by reviewing the evolution of the conflict in South Sudan. I will then talk about the operating environment and associated challenges, drawing on our experience, before then turning to how we are addressing those challenges in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

The start of the conflict in December 2013 was due to a split of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the formation of the SPLA-in Opposition. At that time, fighting mostly took place in the Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity states. The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, signed on 17 August 2015, collapsed in July 2016, and the conflict resumed.

Since then, fighting has spread to other parts of the country, including the Equatorias, a critical food-growing area, where a multitude of new actors are currently involved. At the same time, long-standing communal conflicts, fuelled by competition for land and water resources, have persisted and, in most cases, have became more violent and destructive due to the widespread availability of automatic weapons.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led process known as the High-level Revitalization Forum resulted in the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 21 December2017. However, fighting among the SPLA, the SPLA-in Opposition affiliated with Riek Machar, the SPLA-in Opposition affiliated with General Tabang Deng, and other armed groups has continued in violation of the Ceasefire Agreement. The fighting often increases each time we approach another round of talks as parties jostle for prominence, as we are currently witnessing.

The security and operational environment in South Sudan has become increasingly complex. We have moved from a conflict that involves only two parties to one in which the Transitional Government of National Unity has the upper hand but faces political and military opposition from multiple actors. The Government has increasingly gained control in central states, the capital, Juba, and in other population centres. However, opposition groups continue to operate in several outlying areas, in particular in the north, east and south near international borders, where they enjoy support and seek to retain control or gain tactical advantage.

The protection of civilians remains our priority. We continue to provide physical protection to more than 209,000 internally displaced persons, United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors who live and work within the five protection-of-civilian sites throughout the country. In addition, our presence in Bung reassures and supports the 15 humanitarian agencies that assist 13,000 refugees at the refugee site and the 11 humanitarian agencies that work with 54,000 refugees at the Jamjang refugee sites in Upper Nile and Unity states, respectively.

While that population is a small fraction of the estimated 1.69 million internally displaced persons within South Sudan, it requires more than 40 per cent of the force to accomplish that task. We are therefore working to free up more forces for mobile and outreach operations by introducing surveillance systems and other technologies to enable the protection of those sites with fewer troops and to improve our operational efficiency. More mobile operations will provide an increased security presence and create the confidence that allows people to return to their homes from protection-of-civilian sites and neighbouring countries.

The terrain and climatic conditions in South Sudan are particularly demanding. During the rainy season, from May to October, most of the unsealed roads that link states and major population centres are impassable. Our ability to be mobile for nearly half of the year is therefore highly constrained. As a result, we have had to disperse forces in order to maximize our ability to reach out to and support humanitarian actors. To achieve that, we operate from 17 bases, seven of which are occupied by a single company, each with a maximum of 150 troops. Our forces must travel more than several hundred kilometres between bases, along single-track roads or by the limited number of helicopters we have. That presents additional challenges for resupply and force security.

To address those issues and challenges, we are taking the opportunity afforded by the recent induction of the first elements of the Regional Protection Force (RPF) into the Mission, by reinforcing our operating bases in Yambio and Torit and establishing a new one in Yei, in the south of the country. At the same time, UNMISS military engineers have been repairing roads and operating in remote locations to enable us to be more flexible when responding to new requests for assistance. Those operations also improve security along the main supply routes that link the seaport at Mombasa to South Sudan through Kenya and Uganda.

In the course of carrying out our mandate, we face obstruction, access denials and violations of the status of forces agreement. Sometimes those tactics are employed by Government forces as well as by opposition parties to try to prevent us from gaining access to areas where fighting is taking place. At other times the fragmentation of opposition groups leads to commanders acting independently and not effectively responding to orders or direction from their higher headquarters. In other cases criminals and opportunistic armed groups have inhibited the work of humanitarian actors, at times detaining them for several days in order to demonstrate that they control particular areas. Maintaining a relationship with the Government and opposition groups is vital, while realizing that all parties are responsible for violating the cessation of hostilities agreement and the associated destruction and atrocities against civilians.

Employing patience, good communications with all parties and a robust posture are therefore important to our approach. Our patrols have demonstrated unwillingness to be turned back or otherwise inhibited, even if we have to negotiate for several hours or escalate the issue for resolution at headquarters level before proceeding with our work. We also endeavour to be agile and proactive, where necessary positioning troops where we believe conflict might break out. That has often calmed situations and lessened or prevented violence.

We continue to improve the security and performance of our force peacekeepers. A review of each of our operating bases and protection-of-civilian sites has been completed and action points, including the maintenance of perimeter fencing, security lighting and the provision of closed-circuit security systems, are now being addressed. We are undertaking a detailed review of casualty evacuation procedures and have established a force-protection advisory team, whose responsibilities include identifying risks to the force and sharing best practices to mitigate them.

Resolution 2406 (2018) authorizes a troop ceiling of 17,000 peacekeepers, which includes the Regional Protection Force. We currently have more than 13,700 personnel; we expect the remainder of the Ethiopian battalion of the Regional Protection Force to arrive next month, bringing us closer to 15,000 personnel. In addition to enabling us to deploy more forces in the strategically important Equatorias, the deployment of the first elements of the RPF allows us to provide more security in Juba, protect civilians and assist other United Nations agencies and partners. We also work closely with the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism to enable it to monitor ceasefire violations and to understand what transitional security arrangements may be necessary in future.

In conclusion, encouraging all parties to reach a political solution is imperative. That will in turn improve the Mission's prospects of achieving its mandate. For our part, we continue to work to deter violence against civilians through proactive deployment, while working closely with humanitarian actors, monitoring and investigating human rights abuses and working with all stakeholders to build durable peace. At the same time, we are working to improve the organization, capabilities and employment of the force, along with the required enablers in order to effectively support the Mission mandate and protect our force.

We are grateful for, and continue to count on, the Council's support.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Kamanzi for his briefing.

I remind all colleagues that the concept for this briefing aims to keep it as interactive as possible — the main added value being the question-and-answer segment with the Force Commanders. Therefore, so as to take advantage of this opportunity and hear more from our guests, I encourage Council members to keep their statements brief and focus on the question-and-answer segment.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Polish presidency for organizing this meeting with Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and the Force Commanders of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. I thank them for their informative briefings, which have provided us with additional insight concerning the many obstacles that must be overcome in order to restore peace and security in countries affected by deadly conflicts.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work of the thousands of men and women deployed to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. My delegation pays tribute to those peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the service of the United Nations in peacekeeping operations. Their sacrifices compel us — regardless of our differences on certain aspects of peacekeeping — to step up cooperation in our work to make the hope for peace and security of millions of people throughout the world a reality.

Given the information provided to us by the various briefers, my delegation would like to make several observations concerning the host State's consent and the mandates and resources of peacekeeping operations.

Undeniably, peacekeeping operations are not intended to replace, but rather to support, the authorities of the host State within the framework of a crisis-exit strategy based on an inclusive and credible political process. Wherever United Nations peacekeeping operations, the authorities of host States and all stakeholders in a crisis — as in Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia — succeeded in committing to dynamic cooperation based on mutual trust and achieving realistic and consensual goals, they were able to create the conditions necessary for a successful transition, thereby paving the way forward for post-crisis reconstruction and national reconciliation. We therefore believe that quality relations among the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Force Commanders and all stakeholders involved in the process of exiting a crisis, including local populations, are key, given that they create the conditions necessary for acceptance and firm national ownership of United Nations action.

Clearly, the emergence of non-State actors with political and territorial claims, who are sometimes responsible for actions that run counter to the goals of peace and stability, is one of the major challenges facing the implementation of the principles on which peacekeeping is based — namely, the consent of the host State, impartiality and limiting the use of force to situations involving self-defence. Those new challenges call for us to develop sustainable multidimensional responses and to ensure — despite the constantly changing nature of operational environments — support for the political process aimed at ending the crisis, which remains the cornerstone of peacekeeping operations.

The difficulties brought up by the Force Commanders give us reason to believe that the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations depends upon defining clear mandates and setting achievable goals based on a thorough assessment of the environment and the operational limitations specific to every individual mission. Unspeakable acts of violence carried out, in particular by armed groups, against Blue Helmets, humanitarian workers and civilians are a recurring challenge that compel us to develop mandates, the robustness of which must be commensurate with the complexity and asymmetrical nature of the environment in which any given peacekeeping mission is deployed. Those mandates must provide United Nations forces with the agility, flexibility and mobility necessary to move into areas in which violence or warning signs of violence directed against the civilian population exist.

It is also important to note that mandates must not only be flexible but also sequenced so as to enable missions' priorities to adapt progressively to changes related to the host country's sociopolitical and security environment. For example, the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, which was initially centred on security needs, subsequently shifted its focus on support for maintaining and sustaining peace, thereby enabling better planning for the definitive withdrawal of the mission. Of equal importance to the flexibility and realistic goals of mandates, providing adequate human, financial and material resources is essential to ensuring the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. With regard to human resources in particular, we believe that the Santos Cruz report offers a realistic approach to needed adequate troop training prior to deployment and an assessment framework, which enables filling the gaps observed in theatres of operations through capacity-building.

Moreover, the issue of financing peacekeeping operations, which my country would like to see predictable and sustainable, is as important as providing equipment that meets the requirements of peacekeeping in asymmetrical environments through triangular partnerships.

United Nations missions are made up of a mosaic of contingents and staff members who, although inspired by their common search for peace and stability in countries in conflict, hail from diverse countries and cultures, which necessarily affect their perception of their obligations related to peacekeeping in challenging environments.

In conclusion, my delegation commends the work done by the members of United Nations peacekeeping forces, whose merits are reflected above all in their daily efforts to maintain the cohesion and unity of action of peacekeeping missions so that, despite many challenges, they can continue to be the most effective United Nations instrument in the service of the peace continuum.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank you, Madam President, for providing this opportunity for a candid and constructive discussion with our Force Commanders, whom I thank for their briefings earlier and whom I am putting on notice that I intend to ask them many questions. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for everything that he has had to say, as well as for his leadership on those issues. I think it is very important that our Force Commanders are able to be here in the Security Council to speak truth to us and to be as clear as they need to be. I hope they will be candid.

Before I go into some of those questions, though, I would like to recall the visit that some of us on the Council made to Mali in November 2017. We had the great honour of participating in the dedication of a memorial to all who lost their lives serving in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. I think it is important that we take a moment to pay tribute to all the peacekeepers who have given their lives in service of the United Nations, and to all the brave women and men who are serving now in support of the United Nations peacekeeping operations. I would like to offer the United Kingdom's thanks for their service and for the service and leadership of the Force Commanders who are here today.

Peacekeeping is one of our Organization's greatest achievements. It is an integral part of what our peoples around the world think of when they think of the United Nations, and this year we are celebrating the seventieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping. As we strive for reform in the wider United Nations system, so we must work to make peacekeeping more effective and efficient through better mission planning, more pledges of troops and capabilities and stronger mission performance. We therefore welcome the report on improving peacekeepers' safety and security by the former United Nations Force Commander Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, the United Nations action plan and the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative that has resulted from that. We see three key priorities. First, the Security Council should take a longer-term view of conflicts and set more strategic and sequenced mandates. Secondly, peacekeeping should be better coordinated with other United Nations activities, such as peacebuilding and development. Thirdly, peacekeeping performance should be improved, including accountability where performance is not up to standards.

Here is my first question for our Force Commanders. How is the action plan being implemented in their missions? Major General Deconinck mentioned the importance of intelligence in peacekeeping and situational awareness, that is, sending our peacekeepers out with knowledge of what is going on around them. What improvements have been made in the use of peacekeeping intelligence and how can we in New York further support those efforts? In the context of efforts to further improve peacekeepers' performance, I know that the Secretariat has been tasked with developing an integrative performance policy framework. What is the Force Commanders' view of what such a performance framework should contain? How can we incentivize better performance in missions?

I have a few specific questions on some of the missions. I appreciated what the Force Commander of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur had to say about the reconfiguration work. I would like to ask Lieutenant General Ngondi what he thinks the next step in the Mission's reconfiguration should be. In particular, are any challenges being faced in delivering changes alongside the mandate to protect civilians?

Again, I thought that the statement on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was very helpful. We know, of course, that MINUSMA is working in the same space as the Joint Task Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. How well are the military actors working together to ensure that they are contributing to the common objective in their defined ways? How is the link with development and humanitarian work doing? Is there a coordinated plan that brings together the various military actors, and the development actors behind them, to make the most of all the tools we have at our disposal in Mali?

Finally, regarding the United Nations Mission in South Sudan — and this is something we talked about yesterday in the Council (see S/PV.8249) — I would like to say how impressed we have been by some of the swift and decisive action taken recently in response to cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. That is obviously still a big problem in some missions. It would be helpful to have some examples of best practices used in South Sudan that might help other missions learn and respond effectively if that happens to them. I will conclude there, in the spirit of interactiveness, and would like to reiterate my sincere gratitude to all of those serving in blue for the good of all of us.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his assessment of the current state of United Nations peacekeeping. We also thank the Force Commanders of the military components of the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Darfur, Mali and South Sudan for the updated briefings on the state of affairs in their missions. We greatly value the efforts of peacekeepers working in difficult conditions and we would like to pay tribute to all who have given their lives for peace and stability.

The security of peacekeeping contingents is an extremely important issue that we should focus on not only during the preparation of peacekeeping operations but throughout the work of the United Nations presence in a country. The type and nature of the problems in contemporary crises are constantly changing. Peacekeeping operations are more often encountering terrorist attacks on civilian populations and peacekeepers and dealing with the effects of organized crime and the illegal trade in arms and drugs. The situations in the countries where missions are deployed and every theatre of operations have their own characteristics. The proliferation of such threats naturally causes experts and scientists to think seriously about the very concept of the work of the Blue Helmets, and the logic of their actions when it is impossible to distinguish civilians from militants or, for example, when a host country is unable to adequately protect civilians from new threats. That way of thinking often gives rise to the same call, urging that all peacekeepers be given so-called robust mandates and additional intelligence-gathering and use-of-force capacities. We have already heard echoes of that thinking today. For our part, we believe, on the contrary, that in such circumstances peacekeepers should act extremely cautiously. After all, peacekeeping operations embody the ideals of the United Nations. Any mistake can have tragic consequences and undermine the Organization's authority.

The Security Council, troop-contributing countries and host States need an objective assessment of the extent to which expanded mandates for the use of force enable real breakthroughs to be made in fulfilling mandates, and that is especially urgent in the light of the increase in casualties among peacekeepers in the worst trouble spots. Let us be blunt. The experience of missions with robust mandates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali is not very convincing so far. It has also raised a number of serious legal, technical, logistical and staffing issues that should be resolved in an intergovernmental format by the specialized agencies of the United Nations and with the direct participation of troop contributors.

We have to be realistic about this. An inability to find a workable response to the root causes of conflicts and the threat of terrorism should not automatically lead to strengthening peacekeepers' mandates on the pretext that there are no other options. There are options. First, our approach to planning the mandates and peacekeepers' operational work should be more intelligent and painstaking. We should not burden missions with irrelevant tasks that should be handled by specialized United Nations structures. They should focus on the priority issues — supporting the political process, strengthening host countries' national capacity and ensuring security. I would like to hear about how that planning is being done in current conditions.

Furthermore, when preparing and conducting operations, it is important to take into account the views of troop-contributing countries and not to neglect the views and preferences of the local population, some of whom may be supporting armed groups, as in fact happened in the Central African Republic. We should not forget that such cases threaten the security of peacekeepers, civilians, humanitarian workers and country-team staff. Another important factor is ensuring that Blue Helmets are properly trained and have the appropriate equipment. It is unforgivable to create a situation for which there is a robust mandate but where it takes too long to create the conditions in which it can be fulfilled.

At this point I would like to touch on the active security of contingents and the collection and analysis of intelligence, which my British colleague spoke about. We believe that this kind of activity can be carried out only within the limits that have been agreed to by States — in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, with the consent of the host Government, and only for the specific purpose of ensuring the security of peacekeepers and the civilian population. We cannot permit the use of intelligence-gathering means for any other purpose, including achieving the so-called political aims of the mandate.

I want to particularly emphasize the importance of strict adherence to the basic principles of peacekeeping — the consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence and in implementing the mandate of the Security Council. If these are not upheld in robust efforts or, especially, in preventive responses to virtual threats, peacekeepers could become directly drawn into conflicts. We noted in particular that some of today's briefers made references to the Cruz report. As far as I remember, Member States discussed it in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations in March, but it was not approved. Some of its positions are contentious and arguable, and we see no reason to implement its recommendations. We hope that Mr. Lacroix shares that point of view, and we would be grateful if he could clarify the situation.

We also consider unacceptable the attempts by various countries to promote initiatives for United Nations peacekeeping that a small group of States have agreed on outside the United Nations. The non-United Nations Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which permit the use of force against a host Government, are one such initiative. That would immediately make Blue Helmets a party to a conflict. One condition for the success of any peacekeeping operation is constructive and effective cooperation with the host country, which bears the primary responsibility both for the political process and for addressing the root causes of conflict, as well as for ensuring the security of its population, including protecting it from terrorist attacks.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Lacroix, the

Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and the three United Nations peacekeeping mission Force Commanders for their briefings. I want to pay tribute to the Commanders and the more than 90,000 peacekeepers currently deployed all over the world in peacekeeping missions, and to express my deepest condolences to the families of the peacekeepers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

The environment in which United Nations peacekeeping operations are deployed and the mandates they are supposed to implement are increasingly complex. Both the security risks for peacekeepers, and casualties among them, are on the rise. There is a mismatch between the ever-increasing demands of mandates and the limited resources available for them. In accordance with its mandates, the Security Council should play a part in helping United Nations peacekeeping missions cope better with new challenges when meeting the responsibilities they are assigned by the Security Council. First, it is important to be proactive in facilitating the political settlement process of regional hotspot issues. Some protracted hotspot issues have resulted in the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the region and its surrounding areas, with serious effects on the performance of other peacekeeping operations in the same region. The international community should step up efforts to settle regional hotspot issues in the region, while the peacekeeping operations should be responsive to efforts to create the conditions conducive to the political settlement of hotspot issues.

Secondly, peacekeeping missions need clear, feasible and focused mandates. They should be able to focus on the central task of peacekeeping and to abide by peacekeeping's three main principles, while taking into full consideration such factors as the situation on the ground, existing resources and troop-contributing countries' capacities to help host countries strengthen their own security capacity. The work of adjusting to priority tasks and work priorities during each stage should be dynamic, according to the changes in the situation on the ground. Furthermore, when conditions permit and when the countries concerned request it, it is essential to formulate a practical and feasible exit strategy in a timely manner. When mandates are being designed or readjusted, troop-contributing countries should be given more opportunities to participate in discussions.

Thirdly, the Secretariat should be guided to strengthen support for peacekeeping operations. The Secretariat and missions should pay attention to the security and safety of peacekeepers, develop security rules for peacekeepers and enhance early-warning and internal information sharing against security threats. They should ensure the availability of life-saving and life-sustaining services and medical evacuation in high-risk environments. The report on improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers proposed several recommendations, and we hope that the Secretariat will discuss them with Member States and implement them.

China is a major contributor of troops to peacekeeping operations and the second largest contributor to the peacekeeping budget. At present, 2,500 Chinese peacekeepers are on active duty in 10 missions. China is actively implementing various commitments announced by President Xi Jinping in further support of United Nations peacekeeping operations, and we are ready to work with the general membership to improve the United Nations peacekeeping system in a joint effort to maintain international peace and security.

Lastly, I would like to ask what the main factors are affecting peacekeeping operations' ability to respond to security threats. Are inadequate equipment and resources the main difficulty?

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his valuable briefing on his mandate. I would also like to thank Lieutenant General Leonard Ngondi, Force Commander of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID); Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck, Force Commander of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; and Lieutenant General Frank Mushyo Kamanzi of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for briefing us on the situations of their peacekeeping missions.

Equatorial Guinea expresses its gratitude for the work being done in these difficult missions. They represent the true essence of this Organization and the operationalization of its ideals. We would like to pay tribute to all those who risk their lives every day on behalf of the Organization in various parts of the world but, above all, on the African continent.

In the spirit of this meeting, we would like to put forward the following questions.

With regard to UNAMID, for its success, what challenges does the mission face in fulfilling its mandate? What should the Security Council do to ensure that mandates are fully implemented without amending them?

Concerning the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, what is lacking for the tasks to be carried out correctly? In order to fully implement its mandate, what needs to be improved both, on the ground and in terms of the materials used and developed during operations?

With regard to UNMISS, what should be changed, improved or abandoned in order to ensure that mandates are correctly and properly implemented? On whom does the success of a peacekeeping operation depend?

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to convey our gratitude for the convening of this meeting. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the Force Commanders of three important peacekeeping operations for their briefings.

As a troop-contributing country, Peru believes that peacekeeping operations are essential tools of the United Nations collective security system and that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to provide them with the mandates and to ensure that they have the necessary capacities to deal with the conflict situations in which they operate. Unfortunately, the Organization's activities in Darfur, Mali and South Sudan frequently face situations that determine the likelihood of peacekeeping operations achieving the objectives for which they were designed. I refer to situations in which the proliferation of internal and external actors hinders the viability of a political process.

In the light of that problem, we would like to highlight three central elements to be considered when establishing the mandates of peacekeeping operations, on which we have some questions for today's briefers.

The first question concerns the cooperation of the host country and the support of the relevant regional and subregional organizations. In that regard, we would like to ask the Force Commanders present what additional measures could be deployed to promote greater support from national and regional actors for the respective peacekeeping operations?

The second question concerns realistic and flexible mandates that are adaptable to evolving situations. That implies having adequate capacities, including, inter alia, training, equipment, modern technology, medical services and transport. In that regard, we would like to ask our guests about the best ways to bridge the gaps between the difficulties facing them in their tasks and their available capacities.

The third issue is the need to establish appropriate exit strategies with a view to building a sustainable peace. On that point, we would like to know the views of our guests about the possibility of peacekeeping operations establishing a relationship with the United Nations country team and the synergies that can be generated in the transition towards a post-conflict situation.

Furthermore, we believe that independent reviews of peacekeeping operations can help to better identify the priority elements to improve those operations in order to meet the needs observed on the ground. It would therefore be interesting to know the views of our guests about the usefulness and relevance of such reports.

Peru strongly supports the priority given by the Organization and its Secretary-General to the security of the Blue Helmets, and highlights the rapid reaction of the Secretariat to adopt measures to deal with such a situation as part of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

Finally, we believe that it is necessary to approach in parallel the work of peacekeeping operations and the root causes of conflicts, such as human vulnerability, corruption and organized crime, among others.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like first to thank the Polish presidency for having organized this important debate on a topic to which, as the Security Council knows, France is resolutely, consistently and deeply committed. I would also like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and the Force Commanders for their particularly enlightening briefings.

Allow me to thank the Force Commanders for their service, their professionalism and their daily commitment to executing their mandates. I would like also to pay tribute to all their military and civilian personnel, of whose deep commitment all of us here are aware. France would like once again to pay tribute to the memory of all those who have sacrificed their lives in their commitment to serving the United Nations. The

Force Commanders should know that their officers, non-commissioned officers, airmen, sailors and soldiers and, in particular, they themselves have our full confidence.

As the Secretary-General recalled at the launch of his Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which France fully supports, peacekeeping is a particularly complex, difficult, sometimes frustrating but crucial and irreplaceable undertaking (see S/PV.8218). While peacekeeping must above all be part of the political goal of peacemaking, our ambition to protect civilians who are victims of conflict, violence and massive violations of human rights also demands that, together, we be more effective and more able to make a real difference on the ground.

Our collective ambition must therefore be that our operations — the United Nations operations — be conducted and implemented in optimal conditions. We must therefore provide Force Commanders with the necessary means and resources to execute their mandate smoothly and effectively. As members knows, France will continue to spare no efforts to that end.

It is therefore necessary that the troops that we entrust to United Nations peacekeeping operations be fully operational and effective. In particular, that requires complete and high-quality predeployment training. France is fully committed to supporting such operations by training nearly 30,000 French-speaking African soldiers each year, who themselves serve as strong troops for peacekeeping operations.

The requirement for fully operational and effective troops also implies better equipment that is adapted to the terrain and the threat, as well as a better operational posture. We fully believe that better operational performance will reduce the number of Blue Helmets killed or injured in operations, which is still far too high. In that regard, we fully support the recommendations of the Santos Cruz report.

Finally, we are convinced that effective peacekeeping entails bolstering relations between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in particular by strengthening African peace operations. That is a key priority for us at the highest political level. We would therefore be interested in the opinions of our briefers on that issue.

In conclusion, my question today is addressed to the three Force Commanders and focuses primarily the deployment and use of new technology to better protect their assets and their soldiers, while we are aware that such technology will never replace the central role of the men and women whom they command. Peacekeeping forces are all too often targeted by armed groups with indirect fire or improvised explosive devices, which, as we all know, still cause too many casualties in their ranks and prevent them from carrying out their primary mission of protecting civilians. My questions are therefore very simple and straightforward: How can we help them better? What do they need to better anticipate threats and indirect fire? What early-warning and protection technology do they require?

On behalf of France, I would like to thank the Force Commanders once again for their exemplary commitment, with all our due respect.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank the President for organizing today's important dialogue between the Security Council and the Force Commanders. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the three Force Commanders present for their clear and concise briefings. We think it is very useful for the Council to speak to the military staff who have to implement in dangerous circumstances what we in the Council agree around this safe table.

We have witnessed an alarming increase in hostile attacks against peacekeepers over the last few years. The Force Commanders of today's missions face numerous challenges and threats to the security of their forces — we have just heard three of them speak about this.

Too many peacekeepers are killed on mission. The Kingdom of the Netherlands pays tribute to all United Nations peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the cause of peace. Our hearts reach out to the families and loved ones they left behind.

The changed operational environment of peacekeeping operations calls for action by the Security Council, by the United Nations and by its Member States. We therefore see today's debate as being closely linked to the open debate on organizing peacekeeping operations of 28 March 2018, which was presided over by my Prime Minister, Mr. Mark Rutte (see S/PV.8218). Thanks to the leadership of Secretary-General Guterres and Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, we are all giving a quality push to peacekeeping this year.

In that context, we think it is also important that the Council show leadership and take up its responsibility. We look forward to the high-level seminar on peacekeeping intelligence in July and to the high-level event on peacekeeping in September. We pay tribute to the important work done by Côte d'Ivoire as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, and we look forward to its presidency in December in this context.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative. We applaud the tangible progress made in the implementation of the action plan based on the Santos Cruz report, entitled *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers*.

Working together, we must change the way we do business. As Major General Deconinck said, we must change our mindsets. And we must become more capable to act decisively. Working together, we must make peacekeeping more effective. To protect peacekeepers and support them in implementing the mandates they are given by the Security Council, peacekeeping operations have to become more robust.

I will focus on three issues relating to making peacekeeping more effective, and with each issue I will have a number of questions for the Force Commanders: fisst, mission performance reviews; secondly, the importance of an integrated approach; and, thirdly, improving actionable intelligence.

With respect to my first point, on mission performance reviews, since 2017, peacekeeping operations have been reviewed comprehensively since 2017. We especially focus in our discussions in the Security Council on such issues as resource constraints, performance and the cost-effectiveness of mission components. In our opinion, those reviews provide an important opportunity for stock-taking and can provide the basis for much-needed adjustments to mission mandates.

When we review a mission, however, we must also focus on the operational needs on the ground. Mission success depends, on the one hand, on the availability of appropriate resources, and, on the other hand, on having realistic expectations. In that regard, in our view, proper force generation remains essential and needs our continued attention. We welcome the rotation-scheme system that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is developing. In that regard, my questions to the Force Commanders are as follows: Are their operational needs currently fulfilled? Can they plan ahead when it comes to the military they work with? And are the troops Force Commanders receive well trained when they are deployed under their command?

As to my second point, the need for an integrated approach, we feel very strongly that we need an integrated approach that combines three elements, namely, diplomacy, defence and development. Diplomacy serves to get a political solution, defence serves to achieve security and development serves to provide hope for a better future for civilians. Only if those three dimensions come together can peacekeeping operations be effective, which also means that the pillars of the United Nations must work better together. We are therefore a strong proponent of the Secretary-General's reform of the peace and security architecture. My questions to the Force Commanders are as follows: Do they have the impression that the development pillar of the United Nations is working closely enough with them? What could be improved? If they see a need for a quick-impact project — for instance, with regard to water supply — do they call a colleague from the United Nations Development Programme to do that and make it happen?

As to my third point, situational awareness, we see a clear need in missions for integrated and systematic information- and intelligence-gathering and information- and intelligence-sharing among the various actors on the ground. Missions should improve their understanding of the local environment and of the threats that the mission and civilians face. Actionable peacekeeping intelligence is the key to success in the complex environments in which today's missions operate. It is also key for the protection of civilians. Peacekeepers need eyes and ears on the ground to build and maintain situational awareness. I would like to be blunt: better peacekeeping intelligence helps to save lives, in our opinion, which brings me to my last questions: Do the Force Commanders currently have enough early-warning capacity when it comes to the asymmetrical threats they face? Could the Commanders share the key challenges in their missions? How could the Security Council help them to overcome those challenges?

We look forward to the answers of the Force Commanders.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and all the Force Commanders for their respective briefings on the main challenges in today's peacekeeping operations. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the brave men and women who are serving in different peacekeeping missions around the world.

I want to focus on the unprecedented challenges peacekeeping missions are facing today, as the Force Commanders of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur have already explained to us.

Peacekeepers are increasingly being deployed to protect civilians and support complex political processes amid ongoing fighting and high-risk situations characterized by asymmetrical threats. Targeted attacks against peacekeepers and innocent civilians are not only on the rise, but they have increasingly continued to become the norm rather than the exception. This point has already been highlighted by my colleagues, but it needs to be repeated because of the magnitude of the challenge we are facing.

The recent attacks that led to the deaths of peacekeepers in Mali, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are a clear indication that such threats are growing in scale, frequency and complexity. It is therefore imperative that peacekeeping missions undertake reforms and adapt to the changing security dynamics. In that regard, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations review has certainly made important recommendations, and their timely implementation will certainly go a long way in making United Nations peace operations fit for purpose. That, at least, is our view of the matter.

Devising the right political strategies and operational approach has also never been at critical as it is today. In that regard, I would like to suggest the following suggestions, and will be pleased to hear the comments of the Force Commanders. I subscribe to the view expressed by the representative of the United Kingdom on the need to be frank in this exchange of views.

My first suggestion has to do with what has been reiterated by many on numerous occasions, that is, the need for pragmatic and flexible interpretation of the basic principles of United Nations peacekeeping. The traditional peacekeeping versus peace enforcement debate should, at a minimum, be looked at in a more nuanced manner. Peacekeepers cannot, and should not, remain indifferent in the face of significant threats to themselves or to innocent civilians, whom they are supposed to protect.

The Force Commander of MINUSMA referred to the robust use of force. How much flexibility do United Nations peacekeeping principles allow for resorting to the robust use of force? In our view, peacekeepers should have a robust mandate with a clear concept of operations and rules of engagement based on a thorough situational analysis, threat assessment and planning. That will allow them to have a robust posture in defending themselves and protecting civilians in the face of mortal danger. However, having a clear mandate, concept of operations and rules of engagement is not enough.

Therefore, the third point is that peacekeepers need to have the necessary capability that is credible enough to deter spoilers who threaten the mission's mandate and civilians, as well as the peacekeepers themselves. Being adequately equipped also has a deterrence value that is rarely taken into account. We would welcome comments from the Force Commanders on this point. We need to ensure that peacekeepers have adequate equipment, including force enablers and multipliers to be able to counter hostilities and fulfil their mandate effectively in an asymmetrical environment. That has already been mentioned by the Force Commanders, and emphasized in particular by the MINUSMA Force Commander. Peacekeepers must also receive adequate training and acquire the necessary skills to operate in volatile security situations.

Fourthly, although the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) (see S/2015/446) recommended that United Nations peacekeepers should not undertake counter-terrorism operations, it did not rule out such a possibility by capable regional forces and/or ad hoc coalitions authorized by the Security Council. For instance, the African Union (AU) and its regional mechanisms have shown greater commitment and readiness to deploy forces in asymmetrical environments. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is a case in point. Hardly any other mission exemplifies the need for greater partnership than AMISOM — a Mission that is operating in one of the most hostile environments — and let us not overlook the real meaning of what the Mission does on behalf of the international community. AMISOM peacekeepers are facing asymmetrical attacks almost daily, and yet they are underfunded and in a dire logistical predicament. Maybe that applies to other missions as well. Of course, AMISOM is not a United Nations peacekeeping force, but the experience it has had is germane to our discussion here, particularly with respect to counter-terrorism activities. In that regard, it would be useful to hear the opinions of the Force Commanders of how peacekeepers should overcome the challenges posed by terrorism.

From our perspective, on the basis of the principles of complementarity and division of labour, the United Nations should be ready to share the burden with AU-led peace support operations, among others, through the provision of a financial and logistical package. In that connection, the relevant recommendations made in the HIPPO report are a step in the right direction. It is absolutely necessary that they be translated into concrete action.

We know that the points I have raised are easier said than done. We have no illusions that the strategic and operational challenges will be easily overcome. But in the light of the seriousness of the matter, it is imperative that they be addressed as promptly as possible. Otherwise, the commitment to the protection of civilians will remain mere words repeated ad nauseam, with little meaning in the real world, where so many need protection in practice, not theory.

Before concluding, I would like to express my appreciation to the Force Commanders for their briefings and for their work to contribute to peace and stability in Africa. We are grateful for what they and the troops under their command are doing by way of discharging their responsibilities. I look forward to hearing their comments.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I thank the Polish presidency for organizing this important interactive discussion, including the very informative briefings by Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders. We express our appreciation for their insights and commend them for their heroic service. The Kazakh delegation will make general observations and then ask specific questions with regard to individual missions.

Just a few hours ago, many Member States commemorated, together with the Secretary-General and the Office of the President of the General Assembly, a very important occasion — the seventy-third anniversary of the victory day in the Second World War by attending an exhibition at Headquarters, organized by nine countries from my region. As the Secretary-General mentioned in the opening ceremony,

> "Today's commemoration has more meaning than in any of the previous years. We see a world in which conflict is proliferating. We see a world in which so many wars are taking place. So, I believe it is absolutely essential to remind us all of the lessons of the Second World War."

We also regret that so many conflicts and wars are taking place today, especially in Africa and particularly in Darfur, Mali and South Sudan, which we are considering today. In that regard, I would like to remind the Council of the initiative led by my county to elaborate a joint programme to stop all violent conflicts by the United Nations centenary in 2045, which is mentioned in the Council's first presidential statement adopted this year (S/PRST/2018/1).

Our peacekeeping forces remain a most valuable tool. At the same time, the challenge is to use them to create the necessary conditions for political solutions and inclusive negotiations and to implement peace agreements. Above all, we should foster strong and effective cooperation among Governments and between the United Nations and the African Union (AU), especially the AU High-level Implementation Panel and, wherever possible, bring in subregional groups, like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development or selective countries with influence. Other helpful activities could include arm- collection campaigns and the resettlement of large numbers of internally displaced persons, without which there can be no durable peace.

We must also ensure security sector reform to generally improve security situations and to bring about an overall reduction in criminal activities. The successful process of reconfiguring the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur should be an example for other missions too. The challenge before us is to accelerate the peacebuilding mandate, including taking a more proactive role in capacity-building, strengthening governance and improving quick-impact and community stabilization measures, while also working closely with United Nations country teams, primarily through planned multi-year strategic frameworks.

We also commend all the missions on implementing their mandated tasks under very difficult circumstances. We support the Secretary-General's independent review reports of the missions, his Action for Peacekeeping initiative on the basis of the Santos Cruz report, and his good offices. It is in that context that we would like to ask the following questions.

First, how can we modify mandates to enable the resumption of capacity-building and training in the State's armed forces and institutions through a long-term security sector reform programme? Secondly, what must we do in order to stop the ongoing military actions of armed groups and militias, and the widespread violence, all of which lead to severe economic decline, an escalation of the humanitarian crisis and severe food insecurity for millions, the vast majority of whom are also displaced? Thirdly, despite the Secretary-General's action plan, recommendations and best intentions, the challenges seem insurmountable. Development takes time, but how can we initiate comprehensive strategies for economic development and building resilience from the very beginning? Fourthly, how can we achieve intercommunal reconciliation and build confidence among local populations?

Finally, we all know how badly we need improved predeployment and in-mission training, more efficient strategies and better equipment and surveillance capabilities. Last but not least, however, how do we bridge the capability gap? Based on the Force Commanders' experience in the field, what are their suggestions for possible and feasible ways of addressing those gaps?

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for convening the Force Commanders here this week. We think that it is an extremely valuable event when Force Commanders have a chance to come together and discuss the common challenges they face in today's environment. As missions deal with ever-greater challenges, it is important for them to share experiences and best practices. I also thank the Polish presidency for convening today's meeting, in which we were able to hear briefings from three great Force Commanders. Not only are their briefings very important, but I would like them and their colleagues in the Chamber to convey how much the Council, and the United States, appreciates everything that the troops under their command do, all the sacrifices they make and their dedication to duty.

As the challenges that we ask peacekeeping to address have grown and the rate of peacekeeper fatalities is on the rise, it is now more important than ever to assess whether a peacekeeping mission is the right tool at any given time for confronting specific challenges to international peace and security. The United States has expressed its strong support for seeing the United Nations raise the bar for the performance of United Nations peacekeeping by institutionalizing a culture of performance, starting with the development and implementation of a comprehensive performance policy that identifies transparent standards for performance and detailed measures to hold underperformers accountable. But performance alone is not sufficient.

In April of last year, Ambassador Haley articulated a set of principles to the Council (see S/PV.7918) to guide our review of peacekeeping missions as their mandates come up for renewal. I believe that those principles are a good prism through which to review mandates, as well as a reflection of our collective discussions in the Council. Much of what I have heard from Council members here today is also reflected in those principles, which are that peacekeeping missions must support the achievement of political solutions; missions must have the cooperation of host countries; exit strategies must be clearly articulated and mandates must be realistic and achievable. Where such conditions are not present, we must carefully consider whether or not the current mandates continue to make sense, how the Council should adjust them and whether there are alternative and more appropriate conflict-resolution tools.

I have just a few questions for the Force Commanders who briefed us today, keeping those principles in mind and articulating a larger philosophical view of peacekeeping and how their missions fit into that prism. With regard to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, is its mandate realistic and achievable? It has a particularly difficult mission. If not, bearing in mind that the Force Commander will endeavour to carry out whatever tasks we entrust to him, which tasks does he feel are really unachievable?

With regard to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, does the Force Commander believe that the Mission's peacekeepers are operationally prepared to meet its requirements, particularly where the protection of civilians is concerned? What does he think the Mission would need to achieve operational readiness? The question of operational readiness is one we could perhaps ask all missions. I welcome the Force Commanders' comments on what is needed to achieve full operational readiness.

Lastly, does the security situation in Darfur require a strong military force presence or could police, for example, assume a more robust role?

I would once again like to thank the presidency for convening today's meeting.

Mr. Alfassam (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing. I would also like to thank the Force Commanders of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali for their valuable briefings.

I would like to address the following four points: threats, performance, exit strategies and agreement among stakeholders. First, with regard to the threats that peacekeeping forces face, over the past five years there has been a regrettable increase in the number of fatalities among peacekeepers. The Security Council has supported the Secretariat in addressing that serious issue. The dynamic nature of conflict and the need to address more than one conflict at a time, as well as the plethora of combatant parties, make us greatly appreciate the major role played by the military components of peacekeeping operations. They should receive greater support from the Council through realistic and flexible mandates. In that regard, we would like to commend the effective role played by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Secretariat in implementing the action plan outlined in the Santos Cruz report with regard to the increase in the number of fatalities among peacekeepers, whose sacrifices in the cause of maintaining peace and protecting civilians is recognized and appreciated.

Secondly, with regard to performance, we welcome cooperation between peacekeeping missions and the Secretariat to identify performance-measurement criteria. We stress that such criteria must measure tangible, concrete budget-related aspects as well as measurable indices. However, peace remains a lofty, priceless goal that cannot be measured in monetary terms. The Council bears a great responsibility for identifying the requirements of the mandates it designs in order to achieve and maintain peace and protect the lives of civilians and peacekeepers while measuring and improving performance. Discipline-related issues, including the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, are of paramount importance. The Council has repeatedly supported that policy and expressed its appreciation for the troop-contributing countries that have addressed incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse in a decisive, immediate and responsible manner.

Thirdly, with regard to exit strategies, the role of military components in peacekeeping missions is not limited to situations where there is ongoing fighting or where ceasefires must be maintained among warring parties. It covers every stage of a mission, from downsizing and reconfiguration to agreement on an exit strategy that can ensure a smooth transition to post-conflict peacebuilding. The peace continuum requires a flexible and gradual transition from military functions to tasks related to stabilization and peacebuilding, as in the case of UNAMID. The role of the military component is the linchpin that holds the mission's other components together. Moreover, continued cooperation between the military and police components of a mission ensures peacekeeping and support for capacity-building, as currently exemplified in the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti.

Fourthly, with regard to agreement among the parties contributing to peacekeeping missions, during our March open debate on peacekeeping operations (see S/PV.8218), we spoke in depth about the role of parties contributing to peacekeeping operations, and stated that the military component is a key pillar for cooperation among them. From the very beginning, the host countries are our first partners in peacekeeping operations, followed by the troop-contributing countries, which play a crucial role in triangular cooperation with the Secretariat and the Security Council. After the troop-contributing countries come regional and subregional organizations, which are playing an increasingly important role, particularly in Africa, as we heard earlier from the briefers. We stress the need for consistent and concerted efforts among all those parties. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations has made available its annual draft report (A/AC.121/2018/L.3), which covers the military component, and this month it is discussing the financial and administrative aspects of peacekeeping operations. All the parties that I have mentioned are essential in reviewing both the mandates and the military components of peacekeeping operations, and continued cooperation among them is therefore urgently needed.

In conclusion, we are pleased that the Council has heard briefings from the Force Commanders on their missions, and we welcome continued interaction with them under the auspices of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We would once again like to acknowledge the sacrifices that peacekeepers make in extremely dangerous environments, and to thank troop-contributing countries and all contributing parties, to whom we express our gratitude for the sacrifices that they have made to maintain peace.

Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking the three Force Commanders for their valuable perspectives, Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing, and you, Madam President, for providing a platform for today's discussion.

We welcome the renewed efforts spearheaded by the Secretary-General to strengthen peacekeeping and move from words to action in making peace operations fit for the twenty-first century. We, the members of the Security Council, must play our part in that process. That entails providing missions with realistic mandates and adequate resources, but also putting political pressure on all key actors and supporting the broader United Nations system's efforts. United Nations cooperation with regional and subregional organizations must also be enhanced. From listening to our three Force Commanders, it becomes clear that immense challenges remain, and we know that the peacekeeping environment today is more complex and entails higher risks than ever before.

In our own experience from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), peacekeeping intelligence is vital for making informed decisions and for operational planning. It is crucial to ensure that missions are able and ready to act on information received, and it is also important to have thorough selection processes for senior mission leadership and military and police commanders The evaluation of leaders must improve, and special attention should be given to a willingness to act, take initiative and assume responsibility. In addition, uniformed units must have the right training, skills and equipment to be able to protect civilians and themselves and to deliver on mandates. That requires support for capacity-building and better reporting on underperformance.

We firmly support efforts to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse within the United Nations system. Proper gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda also requires adequate funding.

Let me conclude by focusing on the questions that I have for our briefers. My first question is for all of them. What do they think the Secretariat, the missions and the troop-contributing countries should do to increase the percentage of both uniformed and civilian female personnel?

My second question is for Lieutenant General Ngondi of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. Given that the task of protecting civilians is the biggest challenge that he faces as a Commander in delivering on his mandate, how does he address that? How are conditions affected by the ongoing reconfiguration of the mission?

My third question is for Major General Deconinck. I would like to ask him to elaborate on the current challenges that MINUSMA is facing in terms of protecting hospitals, health-care facilities and personnel from attacks, and documenting and reporting such attacks. Are the Mission's mandate and resources sufficient for those tasks?

My fourth question is for Lieutenant General Kamanzi. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan, like the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has a more flexible and effective brigade unit. In some regions, we have also seen regional reserves that can be moved between missions on short notice. What would he say are the pros and cons with regard to those more flexible and robust units as brigades or regional reserves?

Ms. Córdova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks your presidency, Madam, for convening this important meeting. We are also grateful for the briefings by Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and by the Force Commanders of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the

United Nations Mission in South Sudan, via videoteleconference from Juba.

The international landscape is not static. It is undergoing profound changes that in recent years have been reflected in the constant threats posed by terrorist groups and transnational crime. That complex reality has shown how important it is to make structural changes in peacekeeping missions in order to enable them to adapt more effectively to their environments and to repel such threats. In the Sahel, for example, both the fighting capacity of armed and terrorist groups to carry out asymmetric attacks, and their ability maintain a strong ideological presence in order to win over supporters, has increased. That has also led to growing profitability from criminal activity, which has become a modus vivendi for such groups. We would like the Force Commander of MINUSMA to elaborate on that issue and comment on the measures that he believes should be adopted in the region.

Over the past almost 70 years, peacekeeping missions have have helped to build peace in various countries around the world by implementing their mandates. Sadly, that has come at a very high human as well as material cost, owing to the deaths of the valuable military components, police officers and civilian personnel who have fallen victim to attacks in the discharge of their duties. Bolivia would like to pay sincere tribute to each and every one of the members of United Nations peacekeeping operations contingents around the world, who stand firm in their efforts to do their work despite some missions' material constraints and insufficient resources, the difficult conditions on the ground and the fragile and volatile security environments that they function in. We are also grateful to the countries that contribute troops, police officers, observers and civilian personnel for their generosity, solidarity and commitment to the United Nations system and to countries afflicted by armed conflict and instability.

The continuing attacks on peacekeepers, which recurred only a few days ago in a number of places, have shown once again the urgent need to strengthen key areas of missions, mainly those relating to situational awareness in the field, units' mobility and reaction capacity and, above all, the strengthening of defence and protection measures for camps and the troops themselves. Peacekeeping missions also need to see improvements in material and especially technical areas if they are to implement their mandates more effectively. It should be noted that the proper equipping and training of troops is the responsibility not only of the troop-contributing countries but of our Organization in general. Furthermore, providing the sustainable, effective and adequate economic, human and material resources that missions need requires analysis that is technical and logistical but above all realistic. In that regard, we emphasize the priority of improving institutional agility for the deployment of troops, as well as selecting those who are the best trained and most specialized to respond effectively to the asymmetrical contexts we have discussed.

As we said in the last open debate on peacekeeping operations in March (see S/PV.8218), important insights and tools for information and recommendations for advocating for change and improving the performance of missions on the ground, as well as optimizing the various levels of decision-making and planning in the system, are reflected in the Brahimi report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (see S/2000/809) and the recommendations in the 2015 report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446). Their overall content examines the various options, mechanisms, tasks and challenges facing such operations today.

We also welcome the report entitled *Improving security of United Nations peacekeepers* by the former United Nations Force Commander Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, better known as the Cruz report. It is a relevant tool that makes a significant contribution to understanding peacekeeping missions' security issues, as well as their structural aspects, mainly with regard to the leadership, mentality, equipment and training of troops. Bolivia believes that it is essential to address those aspects in order to achieve reasonable objectives.

In that regard, it would be helpful to hear first-hand from the Force Commanders here today about the degree to which the parameters in the report are being implemented. And if they are not, how could they be applied in the context of each of their missions? With regard to operational behaviours, the Cruz report also emphasizes that every mission is unique and that different situations require different action, depending on the threat in any given area. However, what never changes is that the interpretation of the mandates should support taking action and not be used to justify inaction. From that perspective, what other steps should the Security Council take to prevent inaction from putting the lives of contingent troops at risk? A preventive approach, within the framework of an in-depth, case-by-case study of the context, is key to the proper design and understanding of mandates, whatever their nature, while respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States, promoting national ownership and without using that approach as a tool for intervention.

In conclusion, we underscore the Security Council's efforts to achieve the objectives established in all its current mandates. Unity among all actors is crucial to strengthening the financial, tactical, operational and strategic aspects on the ground in strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations. It goes without saying that no peacekeeping mission can succeed without the support of the host country. In that regard, continued, smooth coordination, information exchange and confidence-building mechanisms between missions and local authorities are essential.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the Force Commanders for their comprehensive briefings, giving us the missions' perspective on issues that are relevant to the Security Council's considerations of the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions. This year's Heads of Military Components Conference is very timely.

The subject of peacekeeping has been broadly discussed over the past few months. The entire international community has been alarmed by the current state of the security of mission personnel and consequently of the people they aim to protect. We have not only seen dynamic changes in the security environment but, more importantly, a significant increase in threats and direct attacks on peacekeepers. We should take every opportunity to condemn such actions in the strongest possible terms. Needless to say, the security of peacekeepers is of paramount importance for all stakeholders involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations, but we must not forget that it is currently a decisive factor in missions' effective implementation of their mandates.

One of the topics we are considering today is the mandates themselves. The importance of re-evaluating missions' composition and mandates based on the realities on the ground has already been discussed in the Council. I would like to specifically focus on the situations on the ground, their relation to mandates and their direct impact on missions. I would like to ask several questions regarding the missions, but I think this should also be an opportunity for the Force Commanders to convey what they have to say to the members of the Council. I will therefore proceed with my questions.

From the perspective of the Force Commanders, do the current mandates enable the missions and Force Commanders to work actively and, if necessary, proactively in order to fulfil their tasks? If the answer is yes, I would appreciate it if they could prioritize and name the key challenges, limitations or gaps still hampering their missions' effectiveness. If the answer is no, I would encourage them to highlight the areas that the Council should focus on to ensure support for Force Commanders and troops on the ground in implementing their mandates and bringing us closer to the missions' desired end stage.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to convey my most sincere appreciation to all the Force Commanders present in the Chamber today, and to the men and women they serve with around the clock, for their dedication and commitment to international peace and security.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I would like to draw the attention of the Force Commanders to the questions directed to them. Council members would appreciate comments from the Force Commanders on the realities of their respective field missions.

I now give the floor to Mr. LaCroix to respond to the questions and comments.

Mr. Lacroix: I will be very brief because I think it is very important that the Security Council listen to the responses by the Force Commanders. I would like to thank members for their support and their commitment to our peacekeepers and for the tribute that was paid to our colleagues in the field.

I would also like to reiterate the importance of the continuous engagement of the Security Council in support of the collective efforts aimed at improving the effectiveness of peacekeeping. That is very much the spirit of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which is about candidly sharing the challenges that peacekeeping faces, explaining what we are trying to do to address those challenges and highlighting the importance of strong support from Member States to effectively address the challenges. We need the support of Member States as political actors, as troop- and police-contributing countries and as financial contributors and partners.

Turning briefly to the action plan, let me say that we are determined to continue very actively to implement it. Although it does not take on board all of the recommendations of the Santos Cruz report, it is based thereon. I think it is important to highlight that the action plan is not the overall strategy for peacekeeping, because the overall strategy for peacekeeping places primacy on politics. It is very important to highlight the importance of Member State support to further advance political solutions in the many situations where political processes are not moving fast enough. The action plan is essentially a set of very practical recommendations and measures aimed at making the important tool of peacekeeping more effective and more apt to address the current challenges. The implementation of the plan is a collective undertaking. I would again like to express my gratitude to our colleagues in the field, particularly the Force Commanders, for what they are doing.

As I said, we are very determined to move forward. One of the key priorities of the plan is to make sure that we implement our rules and procedures at every level. Another priority is to place emphasis on training. We have a specific plan of action for training, which we have shared with Member States. We work on performance assessment, for which we have a new methodology that we are mainstreaming throughout missions. We are also candidly sharing performance issues with the troop- and police-contributing countries, whenever appropriate, in a spirit of partnership and with the goal of remedying these issues. We are also working on other very important priorities, such as identifying the key shortages in equipment and how to use modern technologies, as well as the importance of further improving the way in which we handle fatalities and casualties.

Against that backdrop, I would like to underline the key principles of peacekeeping, which have been recalled by a number of Council members. Those principles remain the cornerstone of our action. I think it is absolutely critical to highlight the importance of working in close partnership with host Governments and to make sure that there is consent from them. I think impartiality is also a key principle. Our mandates dictate that we support political solutions. The reality is that in many situations we face forces that oppose the advancement of political solutions, and that do that quite often by going after peacekeepers and our colleagues on the humanitarian and the development side. The issue of the use of force is also very relevant to that. Peacekeeping is not war. The use of force is determined either by self-defence or by the importance of defending the mandate. In some cases, defending the mandate includes making good on our protection-of-civilian mandate, but also making sure that we defend ourselves and the mission against those who are in the business of derailing a political solution.

Turning to the strategic review, I wish to say that we will continue to conduct and to implement strategic reviews. We need the support of the Security Council for that. At the same time, it is probably too early to assess what the impact of strategic reviews will be on missions will be. It will be important for Member States to take a look at the impact in order to judge for themselves whether such reviews make a difference or not. We intend to continue along those lines.

Let me conclude by saying that I agree with the comments made on the issue of capability shortfalls. In spite of the fact that we have more potential contributors to peacekeeping and more pledges for our missions, we still have a critical capacity shortfall in a number of areas. It is important to further work on creative solutions to remedy the situation. Smart pledges represent an important avenue in that regard, whereby pledges and contributions rotate on a yearly basis in order to make sure that the contributors of critical assets do not see their assets committed for too long to a particular mission. It is equally important, as some Member States recalled, to highlight the importance of an integrated approach. Some of the Force Commanders made that point very accurately.

Finally, on the issue of complementarity, it entails making sure that we enable other organizations, particularly regional and subregional organizations, to respond to the situation with their own operations, adequately supported with predictable and sustainable support and funding.

The President: I thank Mr. Lacroix for the clarifications he has provided.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Ngondi to respond to the questions and comments.

Lieutenant General Ngondi: Before I respond to the specific questions, I should like to make two remarks. First, I am very thankful for the kind words that Security Council members have expressed to us in recognizing the hard work that peacekeepers are doing in the field. Secondly, I appreciate the desire expressed by members to support peacekeepers either as a Council or as individual States.

Having listened to the debate, I want to suggest the need to borrow from the military planning and decision-making process. I think there is a gap in our planning and in the formulation of mandates. The military planning and decision-making process requires expert examination in order to understand the situation and to identify what needs to be done and with what strategy. At the end of the day, therefore, they come up with ends, ways and means and mobilize them to undertake an attack. They have a very deliberate strategic implementation mechanism. If our mandates were arrived at through that process, I do not think that we would be having problems. I know that violent situations require rapid action. However, that does not mean that we do not follow up to ensure that a complete decision-making process has been followed from the very start. That can still be followed up. Adequate capability and strategies will therefore have been provided to implement the ways, means and ends.

The second issue is robustness. As Force Commanders, we have debated that at length We know that every mission has its unique security and operational challenges. Robustness does not necessarily mean the use of force. The nearest definition of robustness that we have is being vigorous in pursuit of an objective. "Vigorous" does not necessarily mean using weapons, machinery and so on, but using what is available, depending on what has been configured. Its second meaning is "capable of performing without failure" — the determination to perform, whether by fighting or pursuing other objectives. Robustness is therefore not confined to the field alone. It cuts across the board — from the Security Council to the field and from the field up to Headquarters and Member States. Everyone must ensure robustness and work out what that they want to pursue. If a strategy exists, the objective can be achieved. That is why I said, in answer to the specific question from the concept note, that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) was sufficiently robust, because it has the capabilities in terms of the various components put together. If it is sufficiently robust, it will achieve its objective. Having said that, let me turn to the specific questions.

First, to respond to the question from the representative of the United Kingdom as to the next step after reconfiguration and the challenges that have been experienced in mandate implementation, it is an open secret that UNAMID is on its way out, having done what it was supposed to do. That process started a long time ago, with the adoption of resolution 2363 (2017), which indicated that direction. Unless something changes, if all factors remain the same, that train is on its way. What we have therefore said very clearly is that what we need next is a very good, detailed transition plan. The transition will try to ensure that the gains that the United Nations has made in the field do not go to waste but are handed over to someone. We pass the baton to someone. That can be the Government, a United Nations country team or civil-society organizations that take on the role of providing basic services, because our mandate is to ensure the protection of all civilians, deliver humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people, assist with community resolution mechanisms and, of course, to support the political aspect, which is mediation between the Government and the parties that have not signed the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. That is presumed to be the answer, and it can be given life only by the people who are discussing it. The mission is on its way out. The answer is a smooth transition to ensure that the gains that have been made are not in vain.

Secondly, what are the challenges around those four areas? There are a few. For example, where the protection of civilians is concerned, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are registered is more than 1.7 million. There are only a few of us, and we cannot cover every individual. There are areas where we cannot be and areas we must focus on, particularly IDPs who have differences with the Government, which we know can very easily cause a crisis. That is where we need to use our limited capabilities. They may be there not because of the conflict but because of other problems, such as drought or intercommunal conflict, which the Government can sort out as long as it has the capability. At the moment we are present in most areas because of a lack of capacity on the part of the Government. However, the area we need to focus on is where there are peacekeeping-related issues and the presence of armed groups, which can attract

Government hostility at any time. That is where we need to be present. It is where people have run away from, and if we are present, we will create a pull factor for the IDPs to come from wherever they ran to, return to their own area and start their normal lives again. In general, that is what UNAMID sees, and that is the direction.

Where mediation is concerned, somebody has to deal with it. I tend to think that at the ground level we interact with the population. But the top leadership of the groups that have not come to the table must be persuaded to do so. They must be educated to see that this is the only way to benefit the people whom they profess to lead. Otherwise, they are likely to attract a lot of hostility on the part of the Government, because it will always try to exercise its sovereignty over the territory.

With regard to major challenges in performance as a whole, a mission must be integrated, bringing together all competencies in terms of those in uniform as well as civilians with various remits. We have observed that such integration sometimes does not extend to all levels. It exists within the mission headquarters, at the sector level and at the team sites, where the activities are. Not everyone is always at those sites — other than those in uniform, the peacekeepers — although civilian components should be there. The integration therefore exists only at two levels, not at field level. That is a question of resources, of what is available. People sometimes do not understand that is where action is needed and that the success of the mission is measured by activities at the lowest tactical level. If, in formulating the mandate and identifying the resources, the ways and means, it can be ensured that all levels are covered, that is good, and any mission will perform in the way it is supposed to. We must therefore be robust in formulating the mandate. We must pursue the process of formulating it with vigour so that we come out with an implementable mandate.

Next, I would like to respond to the question from the representative of the United States. Does the situation in Darfur require a military presence? We have mapped out the area of operations. As I have said before, we know where the military is necessary. The military is necessary where there is a potential for clashes between the Government and parties to the conflict or among other parties in the country, as well as some that are outside the country.

Now, that is where we need to be. We are now there as well as elsewhere, but we are only elsewhere because those who are supposed to be there are not available. That is the capacity gap in the Government that I have been talking about, as well as in the humanitarian bodies in the country, which do not have the capacity to do what they are supposed to do, and which is why we are there. If those capacities can be improved, we can leave that area and focus on the small area where the real crises are, so as to ensure that such crises do not happen or, if they do happen, to mitigate them, so that the population does not suffer a lot. We therefore have a military presence in those specific areas in adequate numbers, with relevant capabilities, in order to tackle the challenges there in terms of coverage, footprint and terrain. That is where we need to be. Until that is sorted out — by the parties being brought to the table or by declaring a cessation of violence between the two — and until the debate, the negotiation, the dialogue is undertaken and the mediation process gets under way, only then will we see the mission pulling out.

The representative of Sweden asked again about how the reconfiguration affects the protection of civilians. As I said, it is a huge area to cover, with few personnel, a small footprint. That is the issue. With the reconfiguration, we are not everywhere. As soon as we downsize, we leave some areas, reducing the footprint of delivery to those who benefit from our services. We cannot do everything everywhere. We can only do what we can do with the capabilities that we have. Nobody should think that the military can be under every tree. No, priorities have to be set based on the intensity of the conflict or danger and on the capability that exists — and we must be where we are supposed to be, even though there will be people who will not benefit from our services. That is the danger. The protection-of-civilians aspect is affected by reconfiguration because we are downsizing while the capabilities of the Government and the other humanitarian organizations are not enough to take over for us. That is the effect of reconfiguration. But we will never be there forever. We will get out.

Lastly, with regard to the question posed by the President in her capacity as the representative of Poland as to whether our mandate is implementable, the answer is that it is implementable because it is understandable. Its components are very simple and understandable and are therefore implementable. They have been implemented. The only challenges are the places where we have some difficulties here and there, where there are restrictions imposed on us — the terrain factor, and the fact that we cannot act as fast as we would like to, that sort of thing. But the mandate is implementable. It has been implemented, including the task of reducing or downsizing and handing over various areas. All those tasks are also implementable because they are well understood and because we have the will and the capacity to fulfil the mandate and as soldiers to obey the instructions we have been given.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Ngondi for the clarifications he has provided. I now give the floor to Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck to respond to the questions.

Major General Deconinck: I thank you, Madam President, and all members of the Security Council for their support to the missions in the field and for their tributes, which I will convey when I return to Bamako, and to Mali, next week.

I would like to add something to what my colleague from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur said. It is important to develop our planning process, to study the equation between the mandate and the means so that we can define the ways and means and ends. But that is not enough. What is missing is what we call in the military a restated mission: did we understand what is expected of us and what is expected of the mission? That is important.

In answer to the United States representative's question as to whether the mandate is achievable, I cannot answer that. I would have to explain the operation design of the whole Mission, the desired end-state of the Mission, the military end-state and the decisive points and objectives. After laying all that out, I might be able to say whether it is achievable or not.

But I would first like to turn to effectiveness, starting with my own Mission. As Force Commander, my task is to support the implementation of the Peace Agreement, create or recreate a safe and secure environment throughout Mali so that we can redeploy the armed forces and security forces, so that the national, regional and local authorities can be redeployed, and so that basic services can be ensured. As Force Commander, I also support the entire Mission with a force in various domains in the field. I also have to protect United Nations personnel and uphold the United Nations mandate. In theory, I could say, "Yes, I can achieve that mandate, of course." But I have to bring safety, security and peace in an asymmetric environment, and sometimes — indeed, more and more often — in combat conditions. In answer to the question as to whether the mandate is achievable, we would therefore have to say perhaps not.

On the other hand, with respect to ways and means and ends, I could say, as my predecessor did in 2016, that I need — we need — more resources, capabilities, people and so on. In 2016, we increased the personnel ceiling by almost 2,000. At the moment we are still working with a gap of 1,400. But the number 1,400 says nothing. It is about capacities. We are still lacking some capacity. Capacity is the product of people, equipment, training and mindset — people, training, equipment and mindset. So when we are talking about effectiveness, I have to cope with that gap in capacities. I will live with that gap until the end of my mandate at the end of this year, and my successor will likely live with that gap too. What we have to do is increase our effectiveness. And that relates to the Santos Cruz report. I will not enter into a debate about whether that report is or is not endorsed or approved by the Council.

I will say that, in April or May of last year, I started taking measures to increase effectiveness, because I have to do that. It is about force generation, and I kept pushing the force-generation button with the Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We definitely need that. It is about tasking: reducing tasks with no added value. For instance, we must stop guarding some small compounds, close them and regroup units. It is about stopping guarding Operational Coordination Mechanism compounds and mixed unit compounds. But they have to be capable of doing that. It is about simply receiving more force protection units, which would mean I would be able to generate additional units using my own resources. That is about increasing effectiveness.

Of course, training and equipping soldiers and advising are mentioned in the Santos Cruz report, as is working on the mindset of the soldiers. It is about counter-threat, which should not be confused with counter-terror: "I have to live and I have to act under threat continuously". Counter-threat is also about countering improvised explosive devices, countering indirect fire and so on, which should not be done with kinetic action alone. When it comes to countering indirect fire, for instance, we have to address the whole chain of command of the opponent, which we do in the Mission as a whole. It is a whole-of-mission concept.

We spoke about intelligence. Of course, there is a crucial need to have current and actionable intelligence to first understand the situation, not only for the force but also primarily for the mission. Where and how should effort be directed — in which domain and location — in order to increase situational awareness. Secondly, we need intelligence to prevent attacks. Three weeks ago, in the aftermath of the attack in Timbuktu, I told my intelligence people that they would have to predict the next location, the next date and the form of the next attack. There is a need for intelligence. Presence, posture and profile have nothing to do with kinetic action, but it is important to be present, have a good posture and profile. It is also about being present and maintaining credibility among populations and deterring the opponent.

I will now move onto force protection.

(*spoke in French*)

The French delegation asked what technological capacities we still need to strengthen protection. The answer is straightforward: we need more early-warning radars, as we only have a few and I need one in every compound. I also need additional short-range and medium-range drones and command systems.

(*spoke in English*)

On the performance of contingents, we are continuously evaluating units. My Deputy Force Commander is in Kidal this week to evaluate two battalions. We do that not only evaluate, but also to take action and to correct what is wrong. We are also measuring the performance of our operations. When it comes to operations, Madam President, you asked how we could avoid inactivity and how our mandate could be more active. We are of course working with the whole Mission in that regard with all the means at our disposal, every six to eight weeks. We conduct such activity, first, for situational awareness, secondly, to ensure the freedom of movement of the force and of our partners and, thirdly, to counter the threat and operate within the seven pillars. That allows us to employ a bottom-up approach to integrate the Mission at that level.

Command control is also on my wish list, as I cannot change policy alone. To do that, I need the support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Lessons learned from past errors are also essential, so as to avoid future failure and to better act or react to recurring incidents.

On effectiveness and coordination with military actors. I am only the Force Commander; there are many military actors active in Mali. I have sometimes heard talk of a military traffic jam in Mali. That is certainly not the case — I would be happy to have 10 more battalions in any of my forces.

We coordinate on our main areas — operations, logistics, support, intelligence and so on — with five partners. The first of those partners is the Malian armed forces. We also coordinate with the European Union Training Mission in Mali, the Group of Five for the Sahel and Operation Barkhane, as they are all mutually reinforcing. I cannot perform any kinetic action related to counter-terrorism; instead, I must rely on our partners to do that. There is therefore a need for coordination and better synchronization among the partners, which we undertake every day.

I will mention one point about one of our partners, the Malian Defence and Security Forces. I do not think I mentioned the need for sound security sector reform plan for the Malian Defence and Security Forces. Such a plan is key because those forces are not only part of our exit strategy, but they also represent part of the solution for implementing the peace agreement. Security sector reform is therefore key, not only for Mali but also for the surrounding countries.

My last point will touch upon female personnel, in response to the question from the representative of Sweden on how to attract more female military personnel within the force. First, I will say that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali is the most dangerous mission in the world, limiting its effectiveness. Secondly, we need women to engage with the population. Again, it is about situational awareness and so on. We need women. However, it is the responsibility of troop-contributing countries to engage more and to commit more female personnel.

On the question about the protection of hospitals — which hospitals? The hospitals of the force or the civilian hospitals in the country? That is not my job. It is of course my job in the case of threats or attacks against civilians and any body. When I say body, I mean including hospitals and so on, on Malian territory; of course it is my job. But the Malian Defence and Security Forces are on the front line. I am there in support in such cases.

The President: I thank Major General Deconinck for the clarifications he has provided.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Kamanzi to respond to the questions and comments.

Lieutenant General Kamanzi: Like my colleagues, I would like to first make some general comments, beginning with the issue of mandate implementation, or the ability to achieve a mandate. The achievement of a mission mandate is indeed a whole-of-mission task comprising all the components that constitute the mission: the civilian component and, most important, the civilian leadership, and uniformed components, namely, the police component, which, in our case, is also composed of formed police units and individual police officers, as well as the military component.

For us to achieve our mission, all the components need to make their contribution. The contribution of the military component, for the most part, is protecting civilians but also — most important — as an enabler and a platform if we want the other components to achieve or make their contribution. In that regard, I mean being able to protect and facilitate access — for example in human rights, political affairs and other components — so that they can do their work in the various places.

We have the responsibility of ensuring the access of humanitarian actors and delivery of humanitarian aid for the recipients. We have the responsibility of supporting the peace process and the peace agreement. In particular, we are talking about support to the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM), which is supposed to monitor and follow up on violations, which in the end helps the force to move the peace process forward.

What I am saying here is that, in the achievement of our mandate, the military component makes its contribution and, in our case, if the question is whether or not we have an understandable and implementable mandate and whether the military component understands us and is ready to make its contribution, the answer is yes. But, for that to happen, we need to address some of the challenges such as those I made reference to previously, which include having the numbers mandated.

I made reference to the fact that we have not reached the ceiling in the number of troops and enablers that the Council has made available to us. For example, the Regional Protection Force (RPF), whose various components are supposed to be at a strength of 4,000 personnel, has stood at slightly over 50 per cent inducted since 2016. Even then, critical enablers such as tactical helicopters and combat engineering elements, which are supposed to help protect and improve our security, are not with us yet. It is therefore important that, while we understand and are ready, we need to be supported and given the resources, especially those that are within our ceiling.

We have talked about intelligence and information as important components for being able to do our work. Information, specifically peacekeeping intelligence, is critical to proper planning and the utilization of the resources at our disposal. Once we have information, we are able to prioritize and employ our resources appropriately and, in doing so, become efficient and protect our troops and those whom we are charged with protecting.

I made reference to looking into the use of surveillance and other technologies to help us efficiently manage the protection-of-civilian sites and allow us to get more troops into other areas, thereby enabling us to create a better environment for the return of those in the protection sites and a more secure environment for the return of those who fled the country. That is happening in places where I indicated that, after inducting the initial elements of the RPF, we will be able to send out troops from Juba and deploy them in the Equitorias so that we improve access as well as security. That has been done to the extent that some people are already coming back from Uganda, where they had fled to refugee camps. Some have come back, not necessarily to permanently settle, but to see what they can do in the areas they left. That should improve as we receive more troops who are transitioning from static functions to deployment in areas where people were displaced or fled from during the conflict.

I will quickly address some specific questions, starting with the question from the representative of the United Kingdom on sexual exploitation and abuse. I would first say that, as a mission, we are committed to implementing the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. For the peacekeeping force, that translates into critical and serious command responsibility, because it also constitutes a protection issue. We cannot allow our forces to abuse or disrespect the people whom we are charged to protect. It is therefore, first and foremost, command responsibility to ensure that policy is implemented.

As a mission, we have also been able to undertake risk assessments of all the positions and areas of operation of our troops. Moreover, we have created an environment in which information is easy to access and transmit, which bolsters prevention. In instances where we unfortunately receive allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse, action is swiftly taken to initiate thorough investigations and collective measures by both the Mission and, where required, national investigators, who receive our full support and cooperation so that we are able to get to the bottom of allegations and take corrective measures. Those are some of the mechanisms in place, which we are working on and continuously improving to ensure that the policy is adhered to.

There was a question about further increasing the number of female members among our contingents. That is primarily the responsibility of the troop-contributing countries, as we employ and deploy the human resources that we receive. We appreciate that some troop-contributing countries have yet to achieve the quotas and numbers required. However, I wish to recognize the contribution from Headquarters and troop-contributing countries. I think that, in response to our meeting last year on 7 July in New York, where Chiefs of Defence pledged to make a difference and increase the numbers of female personnel, we have seen a slight increase of both female officers and female members of contingents in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). I would like to commend Headquarters and troop-contributing countries, and I urge for such progress to be continued; we cannot over-emphasize the importance of the contribution of the female members of our contingents.

The representative of Sweden also asked about the flexibility and employment of brigade unit intervention, such as the Regional Protection Force and, if I am correct, the Force Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With regard to UNMISS and the Regional Protection Force in particular, when the RPF was conceived, in 2016, it was mandated with carrying out specific tasks in Juba. However, since 2016 the situation in Juba has changed, and requirements and changes have arisen in other parts of the country, leading to demands on the Mission. As such, our current mandate includes some flexibility. In addition to making a difference and carrying out its originally mandated tasks in Juba, the RPF has also been able to intervene and make a difference, where required, together with UNMISS forces.

In that regard, I also mentioned in my briefing that we had taken advantage of the deployment of the RPF and its induction into the Mission to move UNMISS forces that were originally elsewhere to the south of the country by first reinforcing company operating bases, so that we can improve security and outreach and also open new bases, particularly in Yei, where I mentioned the impact of improved security and access. It is the same engineers and enablers of the RPF who are helping to build bases and open roads, which are generally supporting the Mission. As such, the employment and deployment of the RPF and its enablers is improving the situation in Juba. The Force is carrying out the currently required tasks and is also helping to make a difference outside of Juba. As I said, we would like to receive combat engineers, who are supposed to be a component of the RPF, as well as tactical helicopters, which would enable us to project and protect our forces and improve the chances of the Mission achieving its mandate.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the question asked by the representative of Equatorial Guinea on whose responsibility it is to achieve mission mandates. It is the responsibility of everyone, because the primacy of a political solution has been underlined. That is the responsibility of everyone, including — or starting from — the Security Council, the United Nations Headquarters, regional actors and, most important, the parties to the conflict. For their part, missions are responsible for the tasks that create an environment that is going to help enable the actors or the parties to the conflict to achieve a political settlement. Therefore, all of us have a role to play. For a mission to be achieved, or for a mandate to be achieved, everybody has a role. But, as underlined again by one of my colleagues, it is us — the missions — who are in the tactical position or environment that requires action, especially in terms of protecting civilians who are vulnerable.

Creating that important environment for political discussions and engagement is therefore an important responsibility. But, again, it is important that everyone contribute — starting from the political to the tactical, security and protective environment that is required for the achievement of the different mandates that we have been given. The mandates are clear, workable and achievable so long as everybody makes their contribution.

On that note, I want to thank everyone and express my gratitude for the opportunity to express our ideas, as well as to appreciate and ask once again for the Council's support as we carry out our mandate and our responsibilities.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8252

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8252nd meeting

Thursday, 10 May 2018, 9.30 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/389)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/389)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mamabolo is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from El Fasher.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/389, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mamabolo.

Mr. Mamabolo: It is an honour and privilege for me to update the Security Council on the situation in Darfur and the work of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Detailed information on these issues is contained in the report of the Secretary-General on UNAMID (S/2018/389) published on 25 April, which covers the period from 16 February until 15 April.

So far, the implementation of the second phase of the reconfiguration of UNAMID is proceeding very well. Significant progress has been made since February, when the Chinese engineering company began construction of the temporary operating base in Golo, while the Pakistani engineering company is improving the road infrastructure in the area, specifically the road connecting Nertiti and Golo. The military and police are engaged in the alignment and establishment of their operational and administrative structures pursuant to resolution 2363 (2017), and to reflect the new UNAMID operational configuration. To that end, the establishment of the State Security Assistance Force, which is responsible for areas outside the jurisdiction of the Jebel Marra Task Force, is on track. The police have deployed to nine of the 10 team sites of the Jebel Marra Task Force, and the deployment of formed police units to the areas from which the military has withdrawn commenced on 1 March.

While it is still early to fully assess the impact on the security and protection-of-civilians situation in areas from which UNAMID has withdrawn, I can say that, so far, based on our assessment following visits to most of the teams sites that the mission has withdrawn from, we have not witnessed nor heard of any adverse impact. We continue to monitor the situation within the framework of our protection-of-civilians mandate. It is also our expectation that the Government of the Sudan will, where it has not already done so, soon establish its authority in the areas concerned, especially the rule of law and justice institutions.

Although the peace process continues to be stalled, one encouraging development is that, at a meeting with the Government of the Sudan in Berlin convened by the German Berghof Foundation on 16 and 17 April, the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi faction and the Justice and Equality Movement in principle accepted the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur as the basis for negotiation. The parties at the meeting, however, could not reach consensus on the timing for the creation of the implementation mechanism of the subsequent agreement, but demonstrated a desire to continue to engage with me in pursuit of a way forward. I am therefore in contact with all the parties to bridge their differences so that they can agree on and sign a pre-negotiation framework as soon as possible. That should pave way for a cessation of hostilities agreement and direct negotiations.

Since my previous briefing to the Council, in March (see S/PV.8202), the general security situation in Darfur has remained calm, except for sporadic clashes between the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction and Government forces and nomads in the Jebel Marra area. As has occurred in previous years, clashes during the dry season became more recurrent between 10 March and 1 April, and again from 20 to 21 April, with the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid staging several ambushes on Government forces as they deployed in the Jebel Marra area. Due to access restrictions, the mission could not verify the number of casualties reported on both sides or on the number of civilians affected. There have also been reports of the burning of villages by the warring parties. A significant number of civilians have been displaced to different parts of Darfur, including to the Sortony internally displaced persons (IDPs) gathering site in North Darfur.

The nature of those incidents and the low casualty figures reported suggest low-scale skirmishes rather than a large-scale operation. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the continued desire of the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid to challenge the Government of the Sudan and sustain the conflict. Although there were reports of possible incursions by the Sudan Liberation Army-Mini Minawi and by the Justice and Equality Movement in East and South Darfur, that could not be confirmed. Those two movements remain largely inactive in Darfur and seem to have observed their unilateral declaration of ceasefire, recently extended until 6 August.

According to the revised figures of humanitarian actors in Darfur, some 1.76 million displaced people are registered as living in approximately 66 camps. For unregistered IDPs — that is, displaced people living in rural settlements and urban areas — estimates vary considerably, especially as there is no systematic registration of displacement outside of camps. Nevertheless, the United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners estimate that an additional 500,000 displaced people live in host communities and settlements in Darfur. From our interactions with those people, they have indicated their desire to return to their places of origin, as long as the provision of security and basic public services is guaranteed. Others are willing to settle where they are only if assured of their traditional land rights and in their original homes. For Darfur to be guaranteed lasting peace and development, durable solutions will have to be found for the plight of IDPs.

As UNAMID continues its reconfiguration and drawdown, the transition phase will be critical in creating the foundation for durable peace. To that end, together with the United Nations country team, UNAMID has finalized a financing approach for sustaining peace in Darfur. We will count on the support of the international community, including Member States of the Council, for its success. It is imperative that concerted efforts be exerted towards the mobilization of financial resources to consolidate and sustain the prevailing peace and stability in the region.

The President: I thank Mr. Mamabolo for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, at the outset, to extend my appreciation to Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), for the comprehensive and most relevant briefing he has just delivered.

We note with satisfaction the favourable results of the joint work between the Government of the Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations, as evidenced by the fact that clashes between the Sudanese Government and rebel groups in Darfur have diminished significantly. Generally speaking, the security situation appears more stable.

The successful impact of the Government-led weapons-collection campaign is commendable, as it has contributed substantially to the reduction of intercommunal clashes. Moreover, as the report indicates (S/2018/389), there has been a significant improvement in the freedom of movement for civilians.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls for due observance of human rights and not neglecting their violations, especially those perpetrated against children and women. While it is true that statistically, as compared to last year, cases of rape have decreased, the situation remains precarious. We expect an immediate end to such atrocities.

The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is concerned about the slow progress in the search for a comprehensive political solution to the conflict in Darfur. The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur is a viable framework for the peace process in Darfur because it is important that all parties show leadership and commit to the implementation and enforcement of the Document. Equatorial Guinea, as always, understands that the conflict in Darfur must be resolved through a political process that allows the most controversial and topical issues to be addressed, improved and resolved. That is why we would like to call on all parties to make efforts to reach peace with the Government through a frank and inclusive negotiation process.

For those considerations, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes it is essential that current efforts be redoubled, particularly support for the Sudanese Government in seeking solutions to the root causes of the conflict. In that regard, we believe it is necessary for negotiations to take place between the Government and the rebel groups in Darfur, and for the Doha Document, adopted in 2011, to be implemented. It is with a view to securing that support that we already endorse the renewal of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in June, as well as the desirability of inviting Mr. Thabo Mbeki, Chair of the High-level Independent Panel of the African Union, to inform the Council of efforts under way, as he did 18 months ago. We also call for the adoption of measures and targeted sanctions against recalcitrant groups or individuals who are reluctant to participate in negotiations between the Government and the rebel groups.

I conclude by once again congratulating UNAMID, the United Nations, the African Union and the Sudanese Government on their hard work and we urge them to continue their efforts.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the UNAMID mandate (S/2018/389). The report informs us of the UNAMID operational environment and of developments in the overall situation in Darfur. My intervention will focus on the security and political situations in Darfur, the operational environment for UNAMID and the different phases of the reconfiguration of the mission.

With regard to the first point, Côte d'Ivoire notes with satisfaction that the overall security situation in Darfur remains stable, in view of the Sudanese Government's continuing efforts to create a secure environment in the country.

My country also welcomes the launch of the Government's arms control plan, launched so that only regular forces are equipped with them, and welcomes the positive impact that the weapons-collection campaign continues to have on reducing intercommunal conflicts and crime.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the extension of the unilateral ceasefire by the Government. However, it urges the parties involved to engage in frank discussions in order to achieve the signing of a permanent ceasefire.

On the political front, my delegation shares the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General regarding the impasse in the Darfur peace process. Despite ongoing efforts by the African Union High-level Independent Panel and the Joint Special Representative to find a political solution to the crisis in Darfur, little progress has been made in the political process and in the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur.

My country therefore notes with regret the persistence of land ownership disputes, which continue to affect the people of Darfur. In view of the situation, Côte d'Ivoire believes that the full implementation of the Doha Document would provide lasting solutions to the root causes of the conflict, including those relating to land management, in the interests of the people.

To that end, my delegation shares Mr. Mamabolo's view that the Security Council should do everything in its power to encourage the various parties to adhere to the Document and embrace the imperative need for a political settlement of the crisis and to redouble their efforts to negotiate an inclusive peace agreement focused on the implementation of the measures stipulated in the Doha Document.

With regard to the UNAMID operational environment, my country condemns the attack on a UNAMID national staff member on 24 February, as well as all unjustifiable acts of violence against UNAMID staff in general, which are violations of the status of forces agreement.

Nevertheless, Côte d'Ivoire notes with satisfaction the improved collaboration between the Government of the Sudan and UNAMID in the implementation of the mission's mandate. Therefore, while welcoming the progress made in that regard, my delegation reiterates its call to the Government of the Sudan to ensure strict compliance with the status of forces agreement with a view to facilitating the fulfilment of the mission's mandate.

With regard to the reconfiguration of UNAMID, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the fact that no negative impact has been recorded following the withdrawal of UNAMID from the various areas in which the team sites were closed during the first phase of the reconfiguration. As for the second phase of the mission's reconfiguration, my country welcomes the significant progress made in its implementation, including the establishment of the Jebel Marra Task Force.

My delegation hopes that the recommendations of the UNAMID strategic review, as mandated by the Security Council through its presidential statement of 31 January (S/PRST/2018/4), will enable Council members to better define the mission's priorities in the context of the renewal of its mandate.

In conclusion, my delegation commends UNAMID for its ceaseless efforts to re-establish peace and stability in Darfur.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, for his comprehensive briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Sudan (S/2018/389). We take this opportunity, through him, to commend the work that UNAMID is conducting on the ground.

At the outset, we underscore the positive aspects highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, in particular with regard to security, which has remained stable, as in previous reporting periods. We also welcome the Government's decision to extend the unilateral ceasefire to all areas of operations until 30 June. We would also like to underscore the positive results of the first arms-collection campaign promoted by the Government. It is clear that this process has contributed to improving the security situation in Darfur. It is important to continue to encourage the civilian population and militias to maintain and increase their commitment to that governmental campaign, which is in line with the peacebuilding process.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we regret that the clashes between the Sudanese armed forces and the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction have complicated the delivery of humanitarian assistance in some areas of Jebel Marra. Despite that, we underscore the improved access of humanitarian assistance to that area, which was previously inaccessible. In the same vein, we welcome the return of the almost 2,000 internally displaced persons to Yasin. However, despite that positive development, many challenges remain. We therefore encourage the international community to continue to support projects that enable internally displaced persons to have to access basic services and improve their quality of life.

Bolivia believes that the political situation continues to be one of the main challenges for the Sudan. We appreciate the Government's efforts to promote the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. Again, we stress that the only way a solution to this situation can be achieved is through a political process that addresses the root causes of the conflict, which are primarily disputes over land ownership.

We also underscore that further efforts are needed to help resolve the differences that exist with regard to the Doha Document. We call on the movements that have not signed the Document to engage constructively in dialogue with the Government and to achieve a permanent cessation of hostilities. We highlight the communiqué of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union of 20 February, which called on the African Union Commission to develop possible measures, including possible sanctions, that could be applied against all those who continue to impede efforts to achieve peace and security in Darfur.

With regard to the reconfiguration of UNAMID, we commend the progress made with the successful completion of the first phase and the initiation of the second phase. We are pleased to learn that UNAMID started withdrawing in the first phase from the areas envisioned and that did not have any negative consequences. We must continue to work to strengthen the country team's capacities to ensure that the withdrawal of the Hybrid Operation is successful. We also highlight the fundraising strategy for sustaining peace in Darfur that was developed by UNAMID and the country team. We must support that strategy to ensure a successful transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Darfur.

Finally, we appreciate this opportunity to acknowledge the great work being done by Joint Special Representative Mamabolo, UNAMID, the United Nations country team and the members of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel to achieve peace and sustainable development in Darfur.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting, and Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid

Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), for his briefing, as well as the valuable work he is doing with his team.

We note that the security situation in Darfur remains relatively stable and that intercommunal violence has significantly decreased. Nevertheless, we must regret that the peace process remains stalled. There is still a need to address the root causes of the conflict and to build sustainable peace.

The human rights situation remains precarious. We note the decrease in human rights violations and abuses as compared to the previous year, but the figures remain high. We are particularly concerned about the vulnerability of women and children and the absence of an institutional framework capable of effectively protecting them.

Peru supports the important work being done by UNAMID in escorting and protecting civilians, which allows women and children to carry out their daily activities outside the camps for displaced persons. That enables humanitarian actors to obtain relevant information about the needs of internally displaced persons.

However, we must condemn the persistence of sexual violence. According to the latest report of the Secretary-General on the issue (S/2018/389), the rate in Darfur is particularly high around the camps for internally displaced persons. We regret that sexual violence is not reported because of the lack of protection for victims and witnesses and inaction on the part of authorities in punishing those responsible. There is a need for women to occupy the posts of judges, prosecutors and police officers. We would like to underscore the work of UNAMID to promote the participation of the population in the child-protection programme, including the establishment of four committees in camps for internally displaced persons, which aim to promote the exchange of information and good practices to respond to reports.

We also wish to underscore the improvements in access to humanitarian assistance in Darfur. However, we are concerned that those improvements have not reached all areas of Jebel Marra, where it is estimated that food insecurity seriously affects the inhabitants of that area, as well as those in North Darfur, who could face a level 4 situation of emergency food insecurity.

In that regard, we welcome the joint fundraising strategy for sustaining peace in Darfur, which aims to facilitate the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding.

We also welcome the efforts of the Joint Special Representative, the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel to revive the peace process.

We conclude by stressing the urgent need for all parties to the conflict to participate constructively, in a spirit of compromise, in the peace and reconciliation process in Darfur, and to make progress in the implementation of the Doha Document and in the establishment of a permanent ceasefire.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We join others in expressing our deep appreciation to the Joint Special Represenative for Darfur, Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, for his comprehensive update on the situation in Darfur. My delegation supports the conclusions of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/389) and would like to make the following observations.

We are encouraged by the continuing improvement in the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur, as well as the overall reduction in intercommunal clashes, criminal activities and human rights violations. That was achieved owing to the strengthened cooperation among the Sudanese Government, the United Nations, the African Union and the successful arms-collection campaign.

At the same time, we note that the progress in the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur has been slow. Kazakhstan welcomes the extension of a unilateral ceasefire by President Al-Bashir until July 2018, which aims to create a conducive environment for peace talks. We hope that all parties in Darfur will undertake the necessary efforts to invigorate an inclusive political process led by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and supported by Joint Special Representative Mamabolo. Furthermore, the Council should consider all the necessary measures to put pressure on those who undermine the peace process.

Like the Joint Special Representative, we are also pleased with the significant progress achieved in the reconfiguration of UNAMID and the absence of a reported adverse impact of the drawdown. We expect that the second phase of the reconfiguration will be successfully implemented and completed within the established timeline.

Given those positive developments, we believe that it is essential to reconsider UNAMID's mandates to reflect the realities on the ground. In particular, we need to give priority to UNAMID's peacebuilding mandate, including support for capacity-building and quick-impact and community-stabilization measures, through the implementation of the UNAMID integrated strategic framework for Darfur and the United Nations country team. Obviously, there will have to be a substantial investment by the United Nations system and donors, delivering as One United Nations, to streamline operations to meet greater demands within personnel and resource constraints.

Finally, we call on the international community to provide the necessary financial and technical support to the Government of the Sudan to address the root causes of the conflict, including poverty, the lack of basic services, drought and massive harvest failures, as well as to ultimately find a durable solution for the internally displaced persons.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, for his briefing.

I shall focus my comments on the security, humanitarian and political aspects in Darfur and the reconfiguration of UNAMID.

First of all, with regard to the security situation, we welcome the positive developments mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/389), in particular the return to stability in Darfur, the notable decrease in intercommunal clashes, the ongoing ceasefire, the weapons-collection campaign and the drop in crime. We took part in the field visit last April, which the President organized in her capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005). We were able to see for ourselves what is described in the report of the Secretary-General, namely, the security situation and the positive impact of the weapons-collection campaign.

The improvements in the security situation and the weapons-collection campaign have also contributed to improving the humanitarian situation. The Secretary-General mentions that development in his report, particularly with respect to an improvement in the freedom of movement for civilians, a reduction in the number of attacks against civilians, a decrease in incidents of human rights violations and an improvement in the delivery of humanitarian aid, as well as increased voluntary returns of internally displaced persons and a reduction in the number of attacks against civilians.

Last Monday, the Security Council, in an Arria Formula meeting, was briefed on the successes in Darfur regarding the action plan for the protection of children from violations in armed conflict in Darfur. We welcome the positive role of UNAMID in strengthening local capacities in the stabilization of Darfur, in particular strengthening local judicial institutions as well as training local civilian partners and security forces in the area of protecting children and fighting sexual abuse and exploitation. We welcome the role of the joint mechanism between the Sudan and the League of Arab States to implement development projects in Darfur. We also welcome the briefing by Lieutenant General Leonard Ngondi, Force Commander of UNAMID, yesterday (see S/PV.8251).

With respect to political developments, we would like to reaffirm the primacy of a political solution in Darfur. We would also like to reaffirm the key role of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. We welcome the return of certain factions to the peace process, as we were able to see in Berlin last month. However, we regret that they have tried to negotiate outside of the framework of the Doha Document.

With regard to the reconfiguration of UNAMID and the future, we welcome the cooperation between the Government of the Sudan and UNAMID. A joint United Nations-African Union mission to the Sudan, which is mentioned in the report, was carried out to visit the eight areas from which UNAMID has withdrawn, as a result of which no negative impact has been noted, During our visit, we were able to observe one of the camps — the Abu Shuk camp, in North Darfur. We hope to see more cooperation between the Sudan, the authorities of Darfur and UNAMID.

With regard to UNAMID's exit strategy, I support the request General Ngondi made yesterday that there should be a clear transition plan that facilitates a withdrawal of the operation.

In conclusion, we await the report of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the second phase and a discussion of the Council on the extension of the mandate in the light of the facts on the ground and in manner that maintains peace.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's accession to the presidency of the Security Council during the month of May. I would also like to commend your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Peru, for his effective management of the Council's business during the month of April. And I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/389), and Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo for his briefing.

As Council members are aware from the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Darfur, and from the various visits conducted by many members to the Sudan over the past period, it is with great pleasure for me to confirm the conclusions reached by those different delegations and missions to the Sudan. The situation in the country has seen huge progress and notable normalization in all aspects, day after day. There is a return to stability, a move towards reconstruction and compensation for years of conflict, irrevocably gone thanks to the efforts of the Sudanese Government with the support of the international community, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), United Nations agencies and friendly and brotherly countries, but above all thanks to the will and the desire of our people in Darfur to reach peace and stability.

What I said in the Council last March during its discussion of the Secretary-General's previous report on UNAMID (S/2018/154), is applicable to the current state of affairs in Darfur (see S/PV.8202). I understand that Council members are aware of the great progress achieved in the security and humanitarian fields, the return of internally displaced persons, the weapons-collection campaign, the intercommunal conflict and addressing the root causes of the conflict.

The current situation in Darfur speaks for itself. It proves that the fact of peace has become tangible in all respects, even in the small pockets under the control of the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid rebel faction. There is a popular sentiment that encourages full reconciliation and sustained peace.

The Government of the Sudan is aware of the needs in the upcoming period, including the various social cohesion and development programmes, as well as addressing the root causes of the conflict. In that regard, it is important to underscore that the international community must provide the necessary assistance to implement such programmes by means of direct support or through the various United Nations agencies or its country team in the Sudan. We call on donor countries to fulfil their pledges. We would like to thank the Secretary-General for having agreed to provide the necessary support through the Peacebuilding Fund. We also thank friendly and brotherly countries, in particular the State of Qatar, Japan and Turkey, as well as the African Union (AU) and the League of Arab States, among others, for their ongoing support to the people of Darfur.

Turning to the implementation of resolution 2363 (2017), which provides for the beginning of the drawdown and the reconfiguration of UNAMID, that decision has proved to be appropriate given the phase of peacebuilding and strengthening security and stability throughout the states of Darfur. We look forward to the outcome of the strategic review conducted by the African Union Commission and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with regard to implementing an exit strategy for UNAMID from Darfur in the near future. That would allow for the necessary peacebuilding and strengthening of stability. It is high time for such steps.

The Government of the Sudan has already started to implement such projects, such as launching a campaign to collect weapons from civilians. Reports indicate that, to date, the campaign has been successful despite limited resources. We are determined to continue the campaign. As we have affirmed previously, it is necessary to collect weapons in order to achieve peace and stability. Everyone, in particular the Secretary-General and the international officials who recently visited Darfur, have seen the positive impact of the weapons-collection campaign on the security situation in Darfur. The Government of the Sudan will therefore spare no effort to implement the campaign. In that regard, we emphasize the importance of our partnership with UNAMID and the ongoing consultations and meetings with the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the AU-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

The political settlement of the situation in Darfur is the main objective of the Government of the Sudan. We are striving to achieve that goal in accordance with the provisions of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, which is the main reference document for peace in Darfur. That was affirmed by the international committee for the Doha Document.

I would like to respond to some questions raised by representatives. By the end of last year, 85 per cent of the Doha agreement had been implemented. As the Security Council knows, the Doha agreement is recognized by the United Nations and the international community. It remains to compel the parties that refuse to be party to the agreement to sign the Document. In view of the broad recognition it has received and the pace of its implementation, we cannot abandon the agreement owing to the leverage of a few people who know that peace, the subsequent elections and democratic representation will exclude them from the arrangement. We must not forget what the former Nigerian President, Mr. Obasanjo, said in 2004 when he launched the Abuja negotiations, namely, that what was of real concern to the armed groups was that they would be dissolved, like salt in water, at the final stage of the negotiations. It is therefore normal that those groups would spare no effort to undermine the peace process and the UNAMID exit strategy, as the Force Commander said yesterday (see S/PV.8251). We therefore call on all countries with influence on the armed groups to pressure them to engage in negotiations without preconditions and to seriously participate without delay so that we can reach a political agreement that would improve the situation and, inter alia, help to achieve a stable and secure Sudan.

In that regard, it would be remiss of me not to mention the significant efforts of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel to narrow the differences and to conduct a series of talks. However, the intransigence of some armed groups that are not part of the military in Darfur and thrive on conflict in the neighbouring countries, in particular Libya and South Sudan, has thwarted efforts to reach a political solution with them or to engage them in the political process on the basis of the Doha agreement. That includes the meetings held recently in Berlin to persuade the leaders of those movements to resume negotiations. That only proves what we have said before, namely, that the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi faction and the Justice and Equality Movement (Jebril) are not part of the solution in Darfur. We reaffirm that those movements represent a threat to international and regional peace and security. The Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction is empowered only by its media spokespersons and political proxies in some camps for internally displaced persons.

(spoke in English)

On the issue of access, I would like to mention that as long ago as 2017, we circulated an aide-memoire on access to the areas targeted in Darfur. Principally, mutatis mutandis, the contents are valid as far as our commitment to access is concerned. We therefore thought the circulation could be useful. We will send copies of it to all Security Council members.

(spoke in Arabic)

We call once again for unity on the mechanisms set up by the Council to help the Sudan to bring about lasting peace in Darfur. The follow-up on the implementation of resolution 1591 (2005) on imposing targeted sanctions must be consistent with the Security Council resolve to bring about normality, as provided for in resolution 2363 (2017). In that regard, we propose a reduction in the number of experts and lifting the military ban in Darfur. There are two options with regard to the listed individuals, namely, either to delist them from the sanctions list or to list Abdul Wahid Mohamed al-Nour in implementation of the resolution 1591 (2005), which warned about his designation on the sanctions list.

(spoke in English)

I beg the Council's kind indulgence to carefully consider the fact that Abdul Wahid Mohamed al-Nour, known as Mr. No, and his small number of followers are obstructing the peace process in Jebel Marra — the only place the Security Council agreed to exclude from the greater Darfur area and in which it maintains a peacekeeping force. Jebel Marra accounts for less than 5 per cent of Darfur's total surface area. I believe there is no other option but to demonstrate the resolve of the international community here in the Security Council by declaring that the ongoing normalization of the situation in Darfur shall not be held hostage to the misjudgments, bad faith and whims of Mr. Abdul Wahid. All that is required for peace to prevail at last in that part of my country is to strip him of all political support and send him a stern and unequivocal message of zero tolerance, as he is the obstacle to peace.

(spoke in Arabic)

In conclusion, we commend the comprehensive and concerted efforts made to conclude the peace process.

Once again we welcome peacebuilding, which will bring about development and, therefore, an end to the conflict. My delegation would like to thank UNAMID for its efforts in all areas, and peacekeepers for their sacrifices throughout the years. We would also like to thank troop- and police-contributing countries. We reiterate our Government's readiness to cooperate with all regional and international partners on UNAMID-related matters until the very last of its components leave the country.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8253

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8253rd meeting

Monday, 14 May 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

United Nations peacekeeping operations

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-14592 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

United Nations peacekeeping operations

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank the Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2018/10.

The meeting rose at 10.05 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8254

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8254th meeting
Monday, 14 May 2018, 10.10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka/Mr. Lewicki	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2018/407)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2018/407)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Vlora Çitaku to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/407, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Tanin.

Mr. Tanin: As reflected in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/407), the past period in Kosovo was generally characterized by a decline in both the quality of actions and the tenor of political discourse between Pristina and Belgrade. In March, tentative, but important, meetings of the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU) were held at the technical and political levels. That working atmosphere was affected when Marko Đurić, Director of the Serbian Government's Kosovo office and Belgrade's lead negotiator for the EU-facilitated dialogue, was arrested after entering northern Kosovo, against the advice of Kosovo authorities, to attend a session of President Aleksandar Vučić's internal dialogue. During the arrest, stun grenades, disabling gas and other acts of physical force were deployed, resulting in a number of injuries, including to an attending Minister of the Government of Kosovo, two municipal leaders, journalists and other attendees. Mr. Đurić was then theatrically and improperly paraded through a street in Pristina before being expelled from Kosovo. Many Kosovo Serbs, already unsettled by the unsolved murder case of Oliver Ivanović in Mitrovica in January, perceived such events with apprehension.

Following the incident, political figures from both sides engaged in an escalation of rhetoric that led to further setbacks in the effort to continue the EU-facilitated dialogue. The Kosovo Serb caucus, Serbian List, announced its intention to withdraw from Pristina's governing coalition. Moreover, it stated its intention to unilaterally form the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, setting a deadline of 20 April, which, however, was subsequently recanted. Whatever factors drove the series of reciprocal taunts, the results seemed close to precipitating the collapse of the Government in Kosovo. The waters were only calmed again with intensive efforts, including with some support from external parties. Most important, significant efforts made by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and his Government, including protracted discussions with the Serbian List and other parts of the coalition, as well as the opposition, have helped to keep the channels of communication open.

There has been discussion over many months about the prospects of a shift in the essentially frozen positions of both sides through the new EU focus on the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and on wider regional engagement. Despite those expectations, recent rising political temperatures have hampered the advancement of the dialogue, which requires sufficient political will from both sides to bring a new level of engagement to bolster the process. There is no other viable option. However, for that to happen, there is a clear need to exercise leadership to stand up to challenges, even with short-term political costs. A new focus by Brussels, at all levels, provides a mutually beneficial opportunity for Pristina and Belgrade to leave the current difficult moment behind and take the dialogue to the next stage of real progress. Moreover, member States of the European Union have set an ambitious calendar for the region, including the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia later this month — the highest-level regional summit since 2003. Additionally, the next crucial meeting of the Berlin process economic forum in July, alongside many other initiatives this year to engage the Western Balkans more intensively, would help all to navigate cross-currents and take advantage of a new commitment.

As much as top-level political assurances remain essential, commitments made in negotiations are unlikely to endure without some impetus for confidence among communities and individuals at the grass-roots level. To create the atmosphere for reason and good-faith compromise to prevail, engagement is needed across all levels, which remains a main priority of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). I am pleased to inform the Council that I have just come from the United Nations Kosovo trust-building forum, held in Ljubljana from 6 to 8 May, which I opened alongside Assistant Secretary-General Bintou Keita. We were joined by representatives of the United Nations Kosovo team, the European Union, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Over 100 community leaders from throughout Kosovo came together to discuss ways to address common challenges caused by mistrust and stale political approaches, some 20 years after the height of conflict.

The starting point of the forum was simple: not to reinvent or reinterpret the past, but to illuminate, guide and pursue a more positive path for the future. Motivated and energetic individuals from across Kosovo society debated the prospects for trust-building through a wide range of positive action and cooperation. The main thematic areas were media accountability, access to impartial justice, economic growth, access to public services, religious coexistence and educational reform. Multiple focus groups worked to strengthen understanding across community divides. The resulting outcomes identified by participants provide a road map for measures to be implemented in Kosovo. Assistant Secretary-General Keita stressed that the forum was a proactive attempt to further the sustaining peace agenda, engage in prevention at the local level, as well as link political and developmental frameworks. I urged all leaders to organize the future, rather than mourn the past, and to move forward with more compassion, understanding and clarity in advancing trust in the areas of work they identified during the forum.

Important for Kosovo's European perspective, the Kosovo Assembly ratified the 2015 agreement on territorial delineation with Montenegro. That issue has been singled out by the European Union as a necessary step for Kosovo's integration with the EU, including visa liberalization, for quite some time. While the international community appreciated that achievement, it has been underlined that the strengthening of the rule of law and human rights and visible progress in the fight against corruption and organized crime remain major issues in meeting the aspirations of the people of Kosovo for their European perspective.

It is also important to acknowledge the approval of a new draft of the Kosovo criminal code, which introduces stricter penalties for offences related to corruption and misuse of official duty. That positive initiative complements ongoing efforts to depoliticize and enhance the performance of the judiciary. We also share the analysis about the effective application of human rights and the rule of law in Kosovo, as recently presented in the European Commission's annual progress report. It is in that context that Kosovo's rule of law institutions continue to be a major focus of both internal and external attention, as EULEX is preparing a significant reconfiguration that will transfer direct responsibility to the Kosovo court system for cases heretofore handled with EULEX in the lead.

Concerning the protection of cultural heritage, I am pleased to note that the Implementation and Monitoring Council, tasked with overseeing the treatment of special protected zones surrounding religious sites, has restarted its work. It is a timely development, as there have recently been attempts to undermine the judgements of Kosovo courts, as well as of those of the Monitoring Council, regarding construction near the Visoki Dečani Monastery, in western Kosovo. The international community will continue to closely watch the Government's actions in that case.

UNMIK continues to prioritize its own work in the areas of confidence-building, human rights and limited, but essential, aspects of support for rule-of-law and justice institutions. Crucial to the Mission's efforts are the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda. On 5 March in Kosovo, in collaboration with UN-Women, the Mission hosted the eighth Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security. Focused on women's political participation, the event brought together more than 150 women political leaders from the central and local levels, including parliamentarians; Government officials;

representatives of the international community, civil society, academia and women's organizations; and youth activists. The Global Open Day recognized the need for women's full and effective participation in leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. It also underlined the fact that women's political participation is indispensable to gender justice so as to end inequality, subordination, hierarchical status and asymmetries concerning political power. The event was central to the Mission's recently adopted gender framework strategy and part of a number of other important initiatives throughout Kosovo commemorating International Women's Day.

The youth, peace, and security agenda is also of paramount importance to UNMIK. Later this week, the Mission, while working together closely in cooperation with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, will host the second United Nations Youth Assembly in Kosovo. The event will bring together 180 young leaders from diverse backgrounds alongside officials, civic organizations and business leaders.

In the multifaceted areas of the Mission's recalibrated work, UNMIK works fully in line with the core principles of Secretary-General Guterres' reform agenda and the guidance of the Council. Our efforts are aimed at sustaining peace; ensuring that we remain at the forefront of monitoring and analysing the situation; and reinforcing strategic cooperation with members of all United Nations entities, as well as international partners, in complementing the efforts of Kosovo's institutions. I thank the members of the Council for their continued support for our efforts and their support to the EU-led dialogue aimed at the normalization of relations and increased cooperation between Pristina and Belgrade.

The President: I thank Mr. Tanin for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Dačić.

Mr. Dačić (Serbia) (*spoke in Serbian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): I thank Secretary-General Guterres and his Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Zahir Tanin, for the report (S/2018/407) on the work of UNMIK and their committed engagement to the implementation of the mandate conferred upon the Mission by the Security Council under resolution 1244 (1999).

I will be open and straightforward in my statement. For some time now, while some members of the Security Council have called for decreasing the frequency of reporting periods and meetings on this topic, others have proposed a closed format for the meetings. Other radical ideas that have been put forward have included that the Mission be terminated and transformed into a political one. We understand some of those arguments. The Security Council agenda is congested, and the crises in Syria and Yemen are incomparable to the situation in Kosovo and Metohija. Yet I call on Council members to listen to my arguments and consider them as well.

The situation in Kosovo and Metohija has changed since 1999, but it is far from ideal. Clearly, based on all prior reports, Kosovo is neither the young democracy or the multi-ethnic society facing occasional challenges that some purport it to be. The reports raise very important questions, as does the situation on the ground. Has genuine reconciliation among communities occurred in Kosovo and Metohija? Have the perpetrators of all crimes been punished? Are the basic human rights of minority communities respected in Kosovo and Metohija? Have internally displaced persons been allowed to return? Regrettably, the answer to all of those questions is "no".

I will discuss the report before us and the events that took place during the reporting period in due time. Prior to that, however, I will point out several important facts that should be borne in mind by all of those calling for the termination of the Mission or decreasing the frequency of our meetings.

UNMIK has been present on the ground for 19 years and has done much to change the situation in Kosovo and Metohija. A great job has been done, but it has not been completed. A long road has been traversed since 1999. Much time was needed to bring the representatives of Belgrade and Pristina to sit at the same table and begin negotiations.

The first agreements were not easy to achieve, but they were achieved nonetheless. Although we have faced substantial problems in the implementation of the agreements by Pristina from the very beginning, we continue to believe that the only way to find a long-term sustainable solution is through dialogue, and that it must be resumed. I therefore believe that it is a duty and an obligation of the Security Council to help find such a solution and normalize the situation in Kosovo and

Metohija, which is — we must not forget — important for the stability of the entire region as well. Much effort has been made to stabilize the situation throughout the past years, and, only if we continue to address all open questions peacefully, can we expect to normalize the situation in the province.

We therefore must not allow all our efforts made thus far to be placed in jeopardy through hasty or unnecessary actions. That is why I call on members to look at the broader picture and support our efforts to arrive at a lasting solution together. Calls for downsizing UNMIK, reducing its budget, changing its mandate and reducing the frequency of Security Council meetings on the subject fall far short of contributing to the creation of a climate conducive to the achievement of those goals. They only add to the existing rifts both among the members of the Security Council and between Belgrade and Pristina. At this moment we do not need a back-and-forth on whether the Security Council should devote three hours every three months — 12 hours per year — to this topic. What we need is to implement all agreements without adding conditions and to find solutions to all unresolved issues exclusively through dialogue.

Let me say now a few words about the current report of the Secretary-General and the events that took place during the reporting period. Those events provide telling evidence that the situation in Kosovo and Metohija continues to be unstable and that an international presence is still very much needed. Members will recall our shock at the previous meeting (see S/PV.8176) at the brutal murder of Oliver Ivanović, the leader of the Civic Initiative "Freedom, Democracy, Justice" and one of the most prominent Serbian politicians in Kosovo and Metohija. The Pristina representatives vowed to leave no stone unturned until the perpetrators were brought to justice. The perpetrators have not been brought to justice. Furthermore, next to nothing is known about the investigation except that no progress has been made and that, due to the complexity of the case, the investigation has been taken over by the Special Prosecution Office of Kosovo.

Serbians in Kosovo and Metohija were shattered and deeply concerned by the news of the events that took place in northern Mitrovica on 26 March, when the talks under the internal dialogue on Kosovo were interrupted by a barbaric act committed by members of the Kosovo special police units. Armed to the teeth, they conducted a brutal raid on the building, using naked force against unarmed civilians. The dangerous, irresponsible and unacceptable behaviour of the representatives of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government was thrown into sharp relief. The Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of Serbia, Marko Đurić, other Serbian Government officials, as well as Ministers of the provisional Government of Kosovo and Metohija from the Serbian community, deputies in the provincial Parliament and other citizens, 36 in all, were injured in the raid. One Serb, a Minister of the provincial Government, was detained in hospital for treatment.

Mr. Đurić, the main negotiator on the Serbian side, was apprehended illegally during the technical dialogue with Pristina. He was harassed, beaten, handcuffed and eventually dragged through the streets of Pristina in an orchestrated display of mob hatred. That was an unseemly act of humiliation unrecorded in the history of diplomacy. I hope everyone saw the footage of how Pristina treats the main negotiator of the Serbian side. How can Mr. Đurić be expected to sit again at the negotiating table in the wake of such treatment? Pristina sought to justify that behaviour by alleging that the visit of Mr. Đurić had not been approved. That is absolutely false. Notification of the visit, in line with the agreement on the arrangement of official visits made under the auspices of the European Union (EU), was sent in time. In fact, the notification was sent long before the deadline provided for by the agreement. EU representatives are informed in detail about this. It is difficult to understand that act as anything other than provocation by Pristina.

The event dealt a serious blow to the dialogue and undermines the peace and security not only of the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija but also of the entire region. The event provides eloquent proof of the instability of the situation in the province and of the speed with which peace and security fall prey to irresponsible and one-sided acts. We were shocked by what happened in Kosovo and Metohija on that day, just as we were disheartened by the absence of a proper response from the European Union, the facilitator of the dialogue. In particular, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo is supposed to oversee the rule of law, including the conduct of Kosovo police. The Kosovo Force (KFOR) also turned a blind eye to the actions of the Kosovo special police units, notwithstanding prior agreements, according to which it should have prevented the members of the special police units from coming to the northern part of the province, which has a majority Serbian population and which is where the sad incident occurred.

I would like to recall that I signed the Brussels Agreement along with Hashim Thaçi and Catherine Ashton. Before the Agreement was signed, we were at NATO headquarters in Brussels where then-Secretary-General Rasmussen took responsibility from KFOR to prevent the entry of any armed forces into a territory with a majority Serb population without approval. Why then did this incident happen? Threats and the use of force must not be tolerated under any circumstances; they must be clearly and unequivocally condemned by all the relevant international actors without reserve. I would also like to recall that Marko Đurić came to Kosovo to talk about the political solution of the Kosovo problem. He did not come to spark an uprising or to do anything that was contrary to the Brussels dialogue. Has anyone ever witnessed a diplomatic representative of any State receiving the kind of treatment observed in Pristina? This is the Head of the negotiating team who, several days ago, sat at the table with the other side, the way Council members are sitting here now. I invite Council members to imagine how they would feel if they were paraded in handcuffs through the streets of a town and then expected to talk about peace. It is clear what the intention was. We support the call in the report of the Secretary-General for a thorough investigation, with corrective action in case of failures to uphold human rights.

There should be great concern over Pristina's aspiration to change and expand the mandate of the so-called Kosovo Security Force. At a recent meeting in Skopje, I had an opportunity to hear Boyko Borissov, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, who holds the current EU presidency, ask Hashim Thaçi if the incident had to occur in that way. Serbia responded with restraint. The aspiration to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an army should be a cause of great concern. That would not only be a flagrant violation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement, it would also be a major step towards destabilizing the security situation in the province and the entire region. I would like to recall that the resolution does not provide for the establishment of a Kosovar armed force; it does, however, provide for KFOR as the only legal military force in Kosovo and Metohija responsible for all aspects of security in the province. Safeguarding KFOR's status neutrality and its undiminished presence is of paramount importance for the realization of its mandate.

Let me point out that the EU and NATO have not supported Pristina's intentions to establish an army of Kosovo, and I expect that they will continue to uphold their position consistently. I would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that a number of countries, EU and NATO members, have accepted the accreditation of so-called Kosovo military attachés, in violation of resolution 1244 (1999). The resolution says that Pristina may not have an army or a ministry of defence or, for that matter, military attachés. Under what provisions of the Vienna Convention has this been allowed to happen? How can military attachés exist in an entity recognized as a State that does not have an army?

I would like to recall once again that Serbia is firmly committed to solving all issues through dialogue, and that we have demonstrated considerable political maturity and responsibility in the past year. Five years ago I personally signed the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina, the so-called Brussels Agreement. As I have already said, the Agreement was not at all easy to achieve and the obligations assumed under it were not easy to implement. Yet we implemented the majority of them, including the most sensitive political ones, such as the integration of the police and judiciary. Pristina also assumed its obligations by signing the Agreement, the most important of which is the establishment of the community of Serb-majority municipalities, mentioned in as many as six provisions of the Agreement.

I emphasize that that is the key part of the Agreement and the obligation that, despite repeated calls by the international community, Pristina has not implemented all these years. As a consequence, instead of analysing the achievements of the community over the past five years, we continue to talk about its establishment even today. The establishment of the community is of crucial and enormous importance for Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija Serbs, since it is designed to protect their vital interests, guarantee the preservation of their identity and improve their everyday life in Kosovo. Its establishment is not and must not be a gesture of goodwill, but a right achieved and guaranteed by all the signatories to the Brussels Agreement, including the European Union. It is not possible to implement agreements selectively and alter them unilaterally. The community must be established in accordance with the Brussels Agreement, its principles and implementation plan.

Statements that may be heard from Pristina's representatives, such as the most recent one to the effect that the establishment of the community of Serb-majority municipalities is contingent upon the granting of a seat at the United Nations, confirms that Pristina has no real intention to fulfil its obligations under the Brussels Agreement and that it is grossly violating it instead. It is with regret that I note that the Head of European Union Office in Kosovo has violated its mandate by expressing her support for the Pristina platform, in wanton disregard of the Agreement on which the European Union put its seal. We have reason to believe that, five years later, Pristina is being disingenuous by embarking upon that process, notwithstanding making assertions that measures will be taken with regard to the community. We are afraid that that may very well be yet another political stratagem aimed at reducing international pressure, rather than genuine readiness to finally comply with the obligations that Pristina has assumed. It is therefore necessary that the Security Council calls in unison today for the establishment of the community of Serb majority municipalities without delay. Repeated calls to both parties to fulfil the obligations they have assumed are inappropriate since one side has already done so and the other has not.

To ensure compliance with and facilitate the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, maintain stability and establish the rule of law in Kosovo and Metohija, an international presence is essential. In that regard, the current EULEX competencies must be maintained. Nonetheless, potential changes must carried out under the watchful eye of the Security Council. It must be borne in mind that such changes would affect the work of other missions and that they too must change if they are to continue to function unencumbered. However, the transfer of EULEX competencies to the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina would bring about a loss of the status neutrality of the Mission and underscore the phony statehood of Kosovo.

It would be remiss of me today not to mention the 200,000 Serbs and non-Albanians who have been expelled and the great number churches, monasteries and cultural and historical monuments that have been burned or destroyed. The report reveals that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recorded three voluntary returns in the three-month reporting period. Council members heard that right — three internally displaced persons in three months out of the more than 200,000 expelled. Does the Council believe that that number is enough and that the international community should give up and stop creating conditions in Kosovo and Metohija to make it possible for internally displaced persons to return and realize their rights? That is the minimum we owe to all those who could not return to their homes in Kosovo and Metohija. Is the fact that only 1.9 per cent of internally displaced persons have achieved sustainable returns not a strong enough argument in favour of the continuation of UNMIK activities and of its strengthening?

The recent arbitrary arrests at the Jarinje crossing provide ample evidence of the violence the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government resort to and Pristina's lack of willingness to promote genuine democracy, the rule of law and respect for basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. Most often, secret lists, compiled mainly on the basis of false reports and fabricated evidence, are used to make those arrests. They are aimed at creating insecurity and fear among the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, affect their freedom of movement and discourage the return of internally displaced persons. The number of returnees can hardly be expected to increase unless systemic solutions are introduced to address the problems that plague them every day, which make for a long and woeful list indeed. In addition to arbitrary arrests, they include institutional discrimination, intimidation, failure to sanction national and religious hatred and ethnically motivated violence, personal and property insecurity and an absence of the rule of law.

I reiterate that the crimes committed in Kosovo and Metohija must not go unpunished. The process of confronting the truth is the first step towards reconciliation, but it is necessary that all those who committed crimes be made to account for them. For its part, Serbia has made significant steps in that direction. Conversely, the perpetrators of crimes against Serbs and non-Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija have not been punished, even 19 years later. Positions occupied by some individuals in the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government cannot and must not obstruct the pursuit of justice. It is a matter of grave concern for us that no indictment has yet been brought in the

Specialist Chambers for crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army and that the beginning of the work of the Chambers continues to be postponed. In his reflections on his time as Specialist Prosecutor, David Schwendiman summed up that concern well.

> "Haste is no friend of justice, but neither is unreasonable delay. The further things get from when crimes were committed, the less credible efforts to address them are going to seem and the weaker the perception of their efforts as legitimate is going to be".

In upholding its laws, in full alignment with international law, Serbia will not desist from prosecuting persons for whom there is evidence that they have committed the criminal offence of war crimes against the civilian population in Kosovo and Metohija. The recent decision of INTERPOL to reissue notices for a number of individuals charged with the commission of crimes in Kosovo and Metohija is very important in that regard.

Serbia protects its national and State interests while fully respecting the tenets of international law, including, primarily, the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It will continue to use all diplomatic means against Pristina's secessionist attempts, which set a dangerous precedent already embraced, as we have seen, by separatist movements in other parts of the world. I am convinced that if perchance found in Serbia's situation, none of the members of the Council would act differently. All of Serbia's endeavours reflect efforts to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity and, ipso facto, the authority of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the legally binding resolution 1244 (1999), which guarantees its territorial integrity and sovereignty and underlines the unacceptability of unilateralism as a way of resolving international relations issues. I would also like to mention that for some time now we have been borne witness to Pristina's attempts to join international organizations — the most recent have been its applications to UNESCO, INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization. Such attempts run counter to the basic principles of international law and unnecessarily politicize the work of those organizations.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all countries that have not recognized the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo for their consistent support and principled respect of the Charter of the United Nations and resolution 1244 (1999), as well as those that have withdrawn recognition or are considering it. I would like to inform the Council that Suriname and Burundi have revoked their recognition of Kosovo. I would also like to advise the members of the Security Council who protest the withdrawals that their protests are not contributing to the quest for an efficient and effective solution to the problem. Unconditional support for one side is not a way to achieve compromise. We treat all Members of this Organization as friends and partners. Reciprocal treatment, including greater understanding of our position and arguments, would be welcome and is expected.

We were on the same side during both World Wars. On 28 July we will mark 100 years since the Serbian flag was first flown on the White House and all public buildings in the United States on the order of then President Woodrow Wilson to honour the enormous suffering of the Serbian people in the First World War. French President Macron is expected to visit Serbia this year. Along with President Vučić, he will unveil the renovated Monument of Gratitude to France, which was built to honour the historic alliance in the First World War. A summit of the European Union and the Western Balkans on the European future of our region will be held in London in July. Serbia wants to find common interests with Western countries. I hope that everyone knows that there can be no lasting peace and stability in the Balkans or in Europe without respect for the interests of Serbia and the Serbian people, as it is the largest State and largest nation in that region.

Serbia's policy is one of peace and economic links and prosperity. I therefore call on all of members once again to focus on seeking a compromise and sustainable solution to this decades-long problem, so that the entire Western Balkans may become a region of lasting peace, stability, security and mutual trust.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Çitaku.

Ms. Çitaku: As always, it is an honour to be with the Security Council today. Three months ago I was in the Chamber on the eve of the tenth anniversary of Kosovo's independence (see S/PV.8176). It has now been a decade of statehood for Kosovo, and much longer than that since the end of the war. We have been through a lot, beginning with a long period of oppression and systematic human rights violations prior to the war and culminating with ethnic cleansing. Despite the dire circumstances and daunting challenges, we never gave up. With hope in our hearts we persevered, and we have managed to rebuild our lives from scratch.

The past three months have been marked by the anniversary of our independence and by reminders of the steep price we had to pay for our freedom. Every day there is a commemoration. Every day a new memorial is unveiled. From Meja to Cusk to Abria, in towns and villages all across Kosovo, people are united in remembering the noble sacrifices of the fallen.

Approximately 30,000 young Kosovars will graduate from high school this year. They will be the first generation of graduates who have not witnessed the horrors of war. They are the first generation of Kosovars to be born in a free country, to grow up without knowing the fear of oppression and without being scarred by war. They have no fear, because freedom is all they know. They were born free, and free they shall remain. What they demand from us is a better future, better quality of education and better jobs. It is what they deserve. However, they also demand truth about the past. In order to truly move on, they require closure.

But truth and reconciliation cannot be built on false narratives or on desperate attempts to establish moral parity. Every time I come here, to this Chamber, I feel compelled to remind Council members of our story, of what happened in the heart of Europe not more than 20 years ago: a brutal war that left hundreds of thousands massacred, missing or raped. All those atrocities — from Croatia to Bosnia to Kosovo — were committed by the Serbian State machinery. I am repeating these facts today, and I will continue to repeat them, because that is the only truth. It is very disturbing to hear the creative revisionist history of our northern neighbours. Their narrative is a serious attempt to rewrite the past, and as such has no place in this Chamber, or anywhere else for that matter, and it is about time that we put an end to it.

The States Members of the United Nations, our dear friends, should recognize the truth. This year Kosovo was omitted from the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250). International humanitarian organizations and local non-governmental organizations have collected an estimated 20,000 accounts of systematic rape and torture perpetrated by Serbian forces during the war in Kosovo. Despite the existence of substantial evidence, no perpetrators of those crimes have ever been brought to justice. Kosovo's experience with the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and its efforts to address that issue are a valuable example to the global community. Beyond politics, we are speaking about basic human rights, which are expected to be respected universally and unconditionally. By turning a blind eye to those crimes we are creating the space for convicted war criminals to not only be represented, but to also abuse the public platform, and that has been happening in our neighbourhood. This is not a matter of my personal opinion, it is a concern raised by the EU Human Rights Commissioner, who said that

> "In recent years, war criminals from Serbia ... have been promoted as heroes and role models by Serbian Government officials, political parties and the media ... [and] this is unacceptable for an EU candidate country".

No wonder we see initiatives for the erection of monuments to a dictator like Slobodan Milošević.

I ask the Council, what does this say about the identity of a society, let alone about the normalization of relations with its neighbours? Surely, it says a lot about a commitment to the falsification of the facts when attempts are made to carve dictators in the stone. In this toxic environment, the infringement of free speech by the State feels very normal, as do the systematic threats to Kosovo Serbs who want to join the Kosovo Security Force or the Kosovo police. Several local Serbs from Kosovo were arrested in Serbia because they joined the Kosovo Security Force.

Let me be very clear on this matter: Serbia does not have a veto on the establishment of the Kosovo armed forces. That is a decision to be made only by the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo. With regard to the Serbs of Kosovo, it is evident that those people just want to live better lives and be integrated into their country. Nevertheless, their aspirations are steadily quashed by a Belgrade that disrupts on all possible levels, as they do on most issues.

Just the other day, the Serbian Government banned a Kosovo karate team from entering Serbia, thereby preventing our kids from taking part in the European Karate Championships being held in Novi Sad. Kids were banned. The Council knows how much effort Kosovo made to become a member of all sports federations, and how much joy it brings to our nation to see our sportswomen and men playing and competing on behalf of their country. Nonetheless, even today, we still have to face all sorts of arbitrary barriers being put up by Serbia. However, in the spirit of true sportsmanship, young Kosovar athletes did not turn to anger or hatred, even during one of the most difficult and heartbreaking moments for them. Instead, they sent their best wishes to all other athletes who went on to compete.

That is not an isolated incident. It is part of a pattern of obstructionism exemplified by a statement made on 23 March by the Serbian Minister of the Interior, in which he indicated that he did not want to see clashes between fans and police over things they do not believe in and are contrary to their interests.

Unfortunately, it seems that with its decisions the Government of Serbia is supporting only the violent and destructive part of Serbian society, at the expense of those who value peace, support dialogue and cooperation and want to work, play and compete together. As stated jointly by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Kosovo and Serbia, it is violence that should be stopped, not sports. With complete confidence, I can add that sports was the sole motivation for our kids when they travelled to the border — they had no political aim whatsoever.

When we are given the chance to be present, to participate, to play and to compete, Kosovo excels, thanks to our athletes, artists and activists alike, who shine brightly and showcase our core values. Such is the case with Feride Rushiti, who joined the ranks of 10 extraordinary women from around the world to be decorated with the International Women of Courage Award this year. Dr. Rushiti is the founder and Executive Director of the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims. Through almost two decades of research and advocacy, Dr. Rushiti has secured access to health care and justice for the civilian victims of the Kosovo war.

Our athletes are not the only ones to be turned away by the Serbian Government. A group of members of Kosovo's Parliament was recently banned from attending a regional conference in Belgrade — on Europe Day, of all days. The conference was supposed to foster regional cooperation and European integration.

The commitment of the Government of Kosovo to developing democratic, inclusive and effective governance that will serve the people of Kosovo without discrimination begins with the strong rule of law. Our institutions are committed to the rule of law. They are addressing the matter with a concrete approach, through the enforcement and implementation of the rule of law, accountability, effective institutional responsiveness and transparency. Our Government is focused on, and committed to, the full implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and European Union (EU)-related reforms guided by the European reform agenda.

Kosovo's Parliament has now voted on the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro, thereby fulfilling the last remaining condition for visa-free travel within the Schengen Zone. While it was unfortunate to see that Serbian members of Kosovo's Parliament, under the constant threats and pressure from Belgrade, declined to vote in favour of the agreement, this is just another demonstration of Belgrade's manipulation of Kosovo Serbs. Serbs in Kosovo should be allowed to make their own choices, without threats from, or fear of, Belgrade.

Over the course of the past month, a number of Serbian Government officials have taken a series of intentional actions that violate the agreement between our two countries, which regulates the visits of officials and establishes procedures for such occasions. That campaign culminated with a public event hosted in Kosovo and attended by Marko Đurić. That was a clear violation, which was preceded by and followed by distinctly inflammatory rhetoric documented by public statements contrary to the spirit of normalization, dialogue, integration, peace and stability. As events unfolded, Kosovo police acted with professionalism throughout the entire process. Đurić's detention and subsequent arrest are standard procedure for law enforcement agencies. They are an inevitable outcome in response to any instance of such actions.

However, that particular violation was not an isolated act. Similar tactics flouting pre-established procedure and defiant of the authority of the Kosovo institutions have been employed by Serbian authorities on various occasions. I must therefore reiterate that Kosovo does not tolerate provocation and is committed to refraining from provocation itself. Serbian officials must understand that Kosovo can be entered only with the permission of Kosovo authorities. Should they fail to obtain such permission and nevertheless enter our country, Kosovo's institutions will respond by following procedure, in accordance with the Constitution and existing laws.

What would happen if, I or any Kosovar Government official, tried to enter Serbia without permission? Serbian Government officials, when they comply with procedure, visit frequently. Following the incident, Mr. Đurić visited Kosovo. Nothing happened, because he obtained the necessary permission and followed the procedures.

Kosovo is committed to normalizing relations with Serbia. We are committed to dialogue, the promotion of good neighbourly relations and the strengthening of peace and stability in the Western Balkans region. In just two days, our leaders will sit together as equals at the Western Balkans-EU summit. Now more than ever, it is crystal clear that the EU will not allow ambiguity to prevail in the region. Serbia must therefore ultimately recognize Kosovo's independence. Ultimately, it was at Serbia's request that the International Court of Justice ruled unambiguously on Kosovo's independence.

Kosovo's institutions launched a working group for the establishment of the association of Serbian municipalities. Unfortunately, owing to the intensive and extraordinary pressure exercised by the Government in Belgrade, there is a reluctance from the local Serbian population to participate in the process. What Belgrade wants is very clear. They want a territorial solution. On the other hand, we in Pristina want civil solutions. We do not believe that the creation of boundaries based on ethnic lines will contribute to peace and stability. Kosovo is a republic that belongs to all its citizens. While we hear numbers floated in the Chamber, let me remind the Council that only in the last elections, approximately 100,000 Serbs participated and voted.

Listing Kosovo's recognition as one of the top threats to Serbia's national security is delusional and harmful to Serbia itself. Kosovo is free and independent, and that will never, ever change. Let me also stress that it is misleading to characterize Kosovo's independence as a defeat for Serbia. Serbia has lost nothing, because Kosovo was never Serbian. Kosovo's independence has been sealed by our people's will, sacrifice and determination.

Allow me also to reiterate that we believe that the time has come for the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to close. We also believe that the resources of the United Nations can be put to much better use. The Security Council can choose to maintain an expensive mission in Kosovo. However, the truth is that there is no role for it.

As I stated at the very beginning of my presentation, the people of Kosovo want to move on. They want closure. As we failed to deliver that, some of them have moved on and found peace on their own. They have risen above the painful past.

Arineta Mula's first hike was a long, steep trail over the accursed mountains as her mother and her three siblings fled for their lives in the spring of 1999 during Serbia's brutal war. She was only seven years old when she became a refugee, but the gripping fear that the Serbian forces would take her brother forced her to keep her feet planted firmly on the slippery and steep terrain. Sounds of artillery and blood stains accompanied her terrifying journey to safety. But Arineta decided to make something remarkably beautiful of that experience. She reckoned that Kosovo was too precious and our nature too beautiful to only be remembered and associated with the pains and horrors of war. Today Arineta is the first woman guide in Kosovo. She proudly walks the mountain peaks with tourists coming from Spain to China and elsewhere in the world, thereby breaking the boundaries set by politics. Arineta resolved that her trail of escape would become a trail of hope for a better life and a better tomorrow — a hope that every single Kosovar carries in their heart.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Tanin for his briefing and for all the good work that he and his team do on the ground. I also want to thank Ambassador Çitaku and Foreign Minister Dačić for their participation today.

The United States strongly supports Kosovo, its independence, its sovereignty and its integration with Europe and the broader international community. Given the reality of Kosovo's independence, which is recognized by the majority of States Members of the United Nations, we call on Serbia and Kosovo to work with the utmost determination towards lasting peace and reconciliation.

The United States underscores its support for the Brussels dialogue. We greatly appreciate the European Union (EU) for its leadership in that effort. The EU's continuing engagement and guidance will ensure that both countries make progress towards the normalization of Kosovo-Serbian relations. We urge the leaders of both sides to seize this opportunity to demonstrate true political will and to work together to reach agreement as soon as possible.

Normalization demands that both countries follow through with the full implementation of their commitments under the Brussels dialogue. We welcome Kosovo's launch of the process to form the association of Serb-majority municipalities, and we look forward to continued work in cooperating on that important and long-overdue task. We also look to Serbia to fully cooperate and to engage in order to finalize the implementation of the energy agreement. The long delays with regard to the agreement have negative effects not only for ordinary citizens in Kosovo but also throughout the region and Europe.

The United States commends Kosovo's ratification of the agreement on border demarcation with Montenegro, which represents a political milestone and a key step towards full visa liberalization with the European Union for the benefit of all Kosovo citizens. However, the United States joins the Secretary-General in expressing concern over the increased tensions between Belgrade and Pristina, which can undermine efforts to maintain regional stability and the safety of citizens in both Kosovo and Serbia. The 26 March events surrounding the arrest of Marko Đjurić in Mitrovica are an example of that. We urge all parties to avoid provocation and to focus on normalizing relations through dialogue.

Additionally, we note with concern the increased tension in the Kosovo Serb community following the killing of the Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović. We continue to support a full and impartial investigation by Kosovo's institutions and call on them to work with urgency and with Serbia's full cooperation so as to bring the perpetrators to justice. We also urge Serbian institutions to investigate the threats against Kosovo Serbs who have joined the Kosovo security forces and are making an important public-service contribution. Rhetorical threats and legal actions against the Kosovo Serbs who have integrated into Kosovo's institutions are contrary to the spirit of the dialogue and must cease.

As we have stated before, the Council must take corrective action on its outdated approach to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The Mission is long overdue for drawdown and closure. The upcoming negotiations in the Fifth Committee on mission budgets will serve as a reminder of the Security Council's critical need to instil fiscal discipline, responsibility and leadership in the United Nations. The nearly $38 million requested for the UNMIK operations does not make sense. While we appreciate the work of Special Representative Tanin and his team, UNMIK continues to live past its purpose, and we must wind it down. The reporting period for UNMIK should be extended to 6 or 12 months, with fewer meetings of the Council. The Council spends as much, or more, time on UNMIK as it does on missions operating in volatile security environments that are crucial to maintaining stability and protecting civilians. We must reorient the Security Council's time and efforts to pressing peacekeeping concerns. We welcome recent expressions of support for fewer UNMIK briefings, and we ask for Council agreement on that change.

Finally, we continue to support Kosovo's membership is all relevant international organizations, including the United Nations. We strongly encourage all INTERPOL members to support Kosovo's membership at that organization's general assembly in November. Kosovo meets all the criteria for membership, which will enhance the international law enforcement community's collective ability to combat terrorism, violent extremism, trafficking, cybercrime and other criminal activity in the critical Balkan region. We also call on United Nations States Members that have not yet done so to join the more than 110 Member States that have publicly recognized Kosovo as an independent State.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Ambassador Zahir Tanin, for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in Kosovo. I welcome the presence of Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affaris His Excellency Ivica Dačić and thank him for his remarks. I also thank Ambassador Vlora Çitaku for her statement.

We took note of what Ambassador Tanin said at the very outset of his statement regarding how much the quality of dialogue between the two parties has deteriorated.

Our position on the issue at hand has always been consistent and clear. We would like to reaffirm our support for a responsible handling by the two parties of the challenge they face and for the peaceful and amicable resolution of all outstanding issues between Belgrade and Pristina in accordance with the Brussels Agreement so that there may be reliable and sustainable peace between the two parties, which can happen only when there is justice for all and rights are respected. We welcome the ongoing efforts made by the European Union (EU) in facilitating the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, as well as its efforts to advance peace and stability in the region.

In that regard, we are encouraged by the high-level engagements by the European Union during the reporting period, including the high-level visits to Belgrade and Pristina in the months of February and March. We also welcome the resumption of the EU-facilitated dialogue and call on Belgrade and Pristina to continue demonstrating good faith and positive commitment to the dialogue with a view to normalizing relations.

The ongoing efforts being made to operationalize an integrated Kosovo judiciary are a welcome step. However, we are concerned with the slow progress on the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. We therefore encourage the implementation of all existing agreements, in accordance with the Brussels Agreement.

We are deeply concerned by the heightened tension and deteriorating relations following the unfortunate incident of 26 March. The concerns expressed by the Special Representative are indeed fully justified. It is our hope that leaders in both Belgrade and Pristina will continue to engage in dialogue in good faith and maintain a positive and constructive spirit with a view to addressing outstanding issues and disagreements through peaceful means. That requires that both sides refrain from actions and statements that could cause ethnic discord, and exert efforts to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence conducive for dialogue.

Ethiopia fully supports the work that UNMIK has been undertaking in discharging its mandates in line with resolution 1244 (1999). Its engagement and support to promote inter-community reconciliation and confidence-building measures in the reporting period is commendable. Recent developments have indeed made it imperative that UNMIK continue to discharge its responsibilities.

It is our hope that UNMIK will continue to promote political dialogue, strengthen community reconciliation and ensure security and stability in Kosovo and the region. We also recognize the significant role of the European Union on matters concerning Kosovo, and we commend the European Union Rule of Law Mission and the Kosovo Force for its valuable contribution in Kosovo in the areas of the rule of law and security.

In conclusion, I would like to state that security and stability in Kosovo and the region will ultimately be ensured when there is political will and resolve on the part of both parties. In that respect, we once again encourage both parties to remain committed to dialogue and negotiation with the view to finding a mutually acceptable solution.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Zahir Tanin, for its informative briefing and for his work. We express our appreciation to and welcome the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku for their statements.

Bolivia calls for the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), including respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Serbia. That resolution remains fully in force, requiring ongoing supervision by the international community. In that context, we reiterate that any attempt to transform the security forces of Kosovo into an armed force would be in contravention of resolution 1244 (1999) and of international law. We call on the authorities of Kosovo to refrain from such action.

At the same time, we view with great concern and condemn the violent acts during the 26 March visit by the Director of the Office of the Government of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Marko Đurić. We urge the authorities of Kosovo to avoid such occurrences, and on both parties to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric, which does nothing but detract from any future arrangement between Belgrade and Pristina and undermine efforts to build trust between the parties. Likewise, we call on the authorities to investigate those events.

Furthermore, we express our concern regarding the slowness of progress in the investigation into the assassination of Mr. Oliver Ivanović, leader of the Civic Initiative "Freedom, Democracy, Justice" party. As long as the investigation stalls, efforts intended to build trust between the communities of Kosovo will continue to be undermined. We therefore call on the relevant authorities to redouble the investigation into the events that culminated in the assassination of the Kosovo-Serb politician on 16 January.

With regard to the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office, we reiterate that the rule of law and its impartial application are essential to fight impunity. Perpetrators of war crimes must answer for their actions, regardless of their condition or origin. In that connection we hope that the authorities of Kosovo fulfil their responsibilities and obligations pursuant to the agreements reached.

Bolivia values the efforts carried out by the European Union and the mediation of the High Representative of the European Union for External and Security Affairs aimed at advancing the implementation of existing agreements. In our view, it is important that the parties comply with the commitments undertaken in the negotiations under the auspices of the European Union. In that regard, we encourage them to impart new energy to the dialogue process, which seems to have stalled after a brief resumption.

We also call on the parties to work towards a peaceful solution through dialogue and in compliance with the obligation to negotiate, as stipulated in international law. Along the same lines, the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, set forth in the Brussels Agreement more than four years ago, should be established in accordance with that Agreement; failure to do so would contravene the Agreement. We call on the Kosovo authorities to respect what was agreed and make progress in that regard in order to ensure the security and rights of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.

We appreciate the work done by UNMIK in accordance with its mandate within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999). We encourage the Mission to continue to work on building confidence between the parties, to resort to good offices to ease tensions, to use peaceful means to seek consensual solutions and to promote political dialogue and respect for rights in safeguarding peace, as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations.

We also commend the work that UNMIK continues to do through its engagement with municipal authorities and representatives of the Kosovo province in protecting the rights of communities, promoting intercommunity reconciliation, strengthening the rule of law, bolstering interethnic cooperation and facilitating the return of internally displaced persons, as well as its work in providing document certification services. In particular, in the past period, we wish to highlight the importance of its work on gender equality and the activities carried out on the occasion of International Women's Day.

Finally, in line with the Secretary-General's statement in his latest report (S/2018/407), we call on the international community to contribute to the trust fund established to implement community-assistance projects to benefit the Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali minority communities affected by lead poisoning in Kosovo, in order to meet their needs in terms of health, economic development and infrastructure.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tanin for his briefing.

In February, the United Kingdom celebrated 10 years of diplomatic relations with Kosovo. In the same month, the European Commission adopted a strategy for a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans. Kosovo's opportunity here was not overlooked. Through implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, Kosovo has an opportunity to progress on its European path.

We welcome the significant milestones that Kosovo has reached since our previous meeting (see S/PV.8176), including the ratification of the border-demarcation agreement with Montenegro. Good-neighbourly relations are a key feature of any European democracy, and crucial for stability in the wider Balkans region. We encourage both Serbia and Kosovo to continue to make progress towards a sustainable solution through the European Union-facilitated dialogue. Progress is vital for stability, security and prosperity in the region, as well as in the two countries themselves. Provocative acts and rhetoric from both sides are deeply unhelpful and antagonistic.

Our priority in Kosovo remains strengthening the rule of law, and challenges remain. We welcome President Thaçi's public commitment to upholding Kosovo's obligations through the Specialist Chambers. We also welcome the speedy appointment of Jack Smith as Kosovo's Specialist Prosecutor, as well as the continuity that provides in the Specialist Chamber's pursuit of justice for victims.

We note that Prime Minister Haradinaj has requested a review into the arrest and deportation of Turkish nationals. As a supporter of democratic values, Kosovo must continue to give priority to the rule of law and respect for international human rights in all its institutions.

The investigation into the death of Oliver Ivanović is clearly ongoing. We have been clear in our expectation that Kosovo's rule-of-law institutions will lead a thorough and full investigation to bring those responsible to justice at the earliest opportunity. But, equally, we expect Serbia to refrain from any provocations that could heighten tensions and to support investigative efforts in an open and constructive manner.

The hard work and dedication of thousands of personnel of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has helped to bring peace to Kosovo. The current situation is in part a result of their work. We also recognize Kosovo's commitment to peace, stability, reconciliation and prosperity. The United Kingdom will continue to be a proud supporter of Kosovo as it strives to achieve its full potential.

Given the scale of the threats to international peace and security around the world right now and the relative stability and progress on the ground in Kosovo, it is clearly inappropriate and inefficient for the Security Council to spend so much time discussing the situation in Kosovo and devoting so many resources to it. The United Kingdom joins other European members of the Council in firmly believing that the situation in Kosovo allows for a substantial reduction in the current cycle of reports and meetings. We further believe that the Security Council must refocus UNMIK's efforts so that the means deployed by the United Nations are tailored fully to the situation on the ground. To this end, we look forward to a strategic review of the Mission in due course.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his briefing on the progress made over the recent months in Kosovo. I also wish to thank both His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku for their statements.

As reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/407) and in Mr. Tanin's briefing, the situation in the Kosovo region continues to be complex and fragile. In that regard, resolution 1244 (1999) remains relevant and provides the main legal basis for resolving the issue of Kosovo. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and appreciates that country's continued efforts to facilitate an inclusive, peaceful and political solution to the situation.

We would particularly like to highlight the resumption of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, facilitated by the European Union, which we hope will assist in the implementation of the such key provisions of the Brussels Agreement as the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. We would also like to commend the various initiatives undertaken with the assistance of UNMIK and the United Nations team on the ground, which have been carried out to foster dialogue, trust and partnerships between the parties, with a view to building peace and security and sustainable development. Ensuring security and stability in Kosovo requires efforts of both parties to continue the dialogue, which is why we encourage them to continue their endeavours aimed at achieving stability on the ground, while respecting the implementation of the agreements reached.

Against that backdrop, we also share the concerns identified in the report with respect to the recent escalation of tensions between Pristina and Belgrade, which could affect peace and stability in the Balkans. Equatorial Guinea finds it unacceptable that Mr. Marko Đurić, Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of Serbia, was arrested and detained during his visit to Kosovo on 26 March. Similarly, we are concerned about the slow progress of the investigation into the 16 January murder of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović. We call for prompt investigations into those two events. Those challenges only damage the trust generated among the various communities and increase the risk of violent extremism and social instability, which make societies more vulnerable to conflict.

For those reasons, we call on the parties to intensify their efforts to improve the rule of law, promote development, peace and security in Kosovo and safeguard good relations of trust among communities living in Kosovo.

The issue of Kosovo is complex because of the existence of such sensitive issues as national reconciliation, which involve the well-being of individuals and the protection of the rights of all populations and communities in Kosovo. The parties in conflict must therefore refrain from any action that could increase tension, and instead give priority to those that will strengthen peace and confidence, which will undoubtedly influence the quest for a final solution that is satisfactory to all.

We believe that all parties must continue to act in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999) and existing agreements, so that through dialogue they can find a peaceful and lasting solution for the benefit of all. In that regard, Equatorial Guinea supports and commends the mandate of UNMIK and the support it provides to all communities in Kosovo. Similarly, we appreciate the efforts undertaken by the European Union in pursuit of a just solution to the situation in Kosovo.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First, let me thank my good friend Ambassador Tanin for his comprehensive briefing. We continue to welcome the good cooperation between the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and its international partners, such as the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. I will focus on three points today: the future of UNMIK, the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU) and the rule of law.

First is the future of UNMIK. Like other European Union members of the Security Council, we firmly believe that the situation in Kosovo allows for a substantial reduction of the current reporting cycle. We furthermore believe that the Security Council should refocus UNMIK's efforts so that the means deployed by the United Nations are tailored fully to the situation on the ground. In that light, we look forward to a strategic review of UNMIK, as suggested by Poland in our February meeting (see S/PV.8176).

Secondly, I turn to the EU-facilitated dialogue. We commend High Representative Mogherini for her continuous efforts in that process. The resumption of discussions in March was an important step towards the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. It should be stressed that in both countries such dialogue requires sincere political will and a united effort to achieve concrete results. We call upon the Serbian and Kosovar authorities to move beyond the present tensions and prove their commitment to the dialogue by continuing discussions and implementing agreements reached thus far.

My third point is the importance of the rule of law. For peace to become entrenched in the fabric of society, Kosovo must protect and promote the rule of law and hold accountable those who have committed crimes. In that regard, we note recent steps taken by Kosovo to reform its judiciary, but we stipulate that many more need to be taken. The Netherlands is the host country of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office. In that context, we express the hope that Kosovo will do everything to uphold its commitments and obligations.

We are encouraged by the recent ratification of the territorial delineation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro. We take that as a sign of Kosovo's continued commitment to peace, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the comprehensive briefing delivered by Mr. Zahir Tanin on the situation in Kosovo. Peru takes note of the statements made by Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku, Ambassador of Kosovo to the United States.

We note with concern the tensions of recent months. We stress, however, the existence of a strong and comprehensive framework, provided by resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels Agreement, to maintain peace and stability in Kosovo and the region. In that regard, we welcome the timely resumption of the political dialogue process facilitated by the European Union, and the meetings held by the technical negotiation teams. We also welcome the ratification by the Kosovar Parliament of the territorial delineation agreement with Montenegro — a development that promotes stability and the normalization of relations in the region, which, in turn, should lead to concrete benefits for Kosovar citizens.

On the other hand, we are concerned about the recurrence of incidents such as the arrest of the Serbian politician, Marko Đurić, in Kosovo and the lack of progress in the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in the country. We consider it necessary for the Kosovar authorities to deal with such sensitive issues with greater diligence.

Similarly, we believe that it is necessary to uphold and strengthen the rule of law and confidence in institutions. That is essential to prevent a new conflict and consolidate sustainable peace. We therefore note with concern the lack of progress in the relevant investigations into the assassination of the political leader Oliver Ivanović.

We also note the need for the Kosovar authorities to cooperate fully with the Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office, which are responsible for prosecuting the allegations of heinous crimes that occurred during the conflict in Kosovo. We would like to highlight the important work of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, in particular in the promotion and protection of human rights. We welcome its training programmes for the Kosovar police and encourage the early adoption of the new criminal code.

We also consider it important to move towards sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of the conflict, promoting reconciliation and policies aimed at recognizing and including minorities and addressing the needs of internally displaced persons. We believe that women and young people should be called upon to play a decisive role in rebuilding the social fabric and creating a shared vision of the future. We welcome the initiatives organized by UNMIK to promote greater participation by women and young people in political and social processes. On the other hand, we must reject and deplore the illegal destruction of protected cultural heritage, as well as hate speech that fuels intercommunal tensions.

We would like to conclude by expressing our support for the work of UNMIK, as well as for the Kosovo Force, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in their efforts to help build sustainable peace in Kosovo and the region.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Zahir Tanin, for his comprehensive briefing to the Security Council on the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (S/2018/407). The State of Kuwait fully supports the Special Representative in his activities and values the vital role that the United Nations has played over the past period in helping Kosovo to build its institutions in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, notably, resolution 1244 (1999). I would also like to welcome Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and Ambassador Vlora Çitaku. I thank them for their briefings.

I will focus my remarks on the political and security developments in Kosovo.

First, I will address the political developments. The State of Kuwait acknowledged the independence of the Republic of Kosovo in 2013. We support all efforts by the Republic of Kosovo to strengthen its security, stability, rule of law and justice system, as well as its ongoing efforts to build up its State institutions. We support its efforts to integrate with the European Union, and we call for stepping up the work to resume dialogue led by the European Union and implement all agreements between Kosovo and Serbia to reach lasting solutions to issues between the two parties so as to ensure good-neighbourly relations and strengthen regional stability and security. We commend the steps taken by Kosovo to accelerate the implementation of the European Union reform agenda, especially with regard to the ratification of the agreement signed in 2015 with Montenegro on the demarcation of the two countries' shared border.

We welcome the resumption of the European Union-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina at the technical level. We urge the two parties to commit fully to honouring all their obligations within the framework of that dialogue, in particular with regard to the establishment of the association of Serb-majority municipalities as a first step towards strengthening trust between the two parties. We welcome efforts to create a comprehensive judiciary in Kosovo in line with the agreements between Belgrade and Pristina. The European Union-facilitated high-level dialogue therefore remains the optimal framework within which to settle pending issues between the two parties and the only way to reach just and sustainable solutions.

Secondly, with regard to security developments, we are concerned about signs of deteriorating relations between Belgrade and Pristina, especially following the arrest of the Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of Serbia, Mr. Marko Đurić, on 26 March. We call on both parties to avoid all provocation and inflammatory rhetoric. We urge the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina to continue to address all matters of concern through dialogue and to demonstrate the necessary political will so as to ensure the full normalization of relations between both parties. We express our concern about the slow progress being made in investigating the assassination of the Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović, on 16 January. We believe that trading accusations will undermine mutual trust among communties throughout Kosovo.

The international community must step up its efforts to encourage Pristina and Belgrade to overcome all their differences and reach sustainable and just solutions that are acceptable to the two parties to ensure peace and stability throughout the region. We encourage UNMIK to continue its active cooperation with Pristina and Belgrade, and all communities in Kosovo to strengthen stability, security and human rights.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Dačić, and the Ambassador of Kosovo, Ms. Çitaku, for their briefings. Considering the situation described by the Special Representative, I will underscore three points.

First, the commitment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to promoting security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo and the region must continue to be commended. In particular, France welcomes UNMIK's activities involving bringing together communities and promoting the women and peace and security agenda, together with UN-Women. As the members of the European Union who sit on the Security Council have underscored, we must continue to be attentive to the realignment of UNMIK's work so that United Nations resources can be fully adapted to the situation on the ground. At a time when there is debate concerning the future of peacekeeping operations, it is our responsibility, as members of the Security Council, to attend to such adaptation, as well as to the coordination of the work of UNMIK with that of other international actors in Kosovo.

Secondly, the strategy for European Union engagement with the Western Balkans published on 6 February attests to the commitment of the European Union countries with regard to the countries of the Western Balkans. The strategy clearly recalls the European perspective concerning those countries, while emphasizing the work that is expected of them so that they might move forward in that direction. France stands steadfastly with Kosovo so that it can pursue its development efforts and the progress made over the past 10 years, deal with issues facing it and meet the needs of the Kosovar people. We call on the Kosovar authorities to pursue reform efforts with a view to consolidating Kosovo's institutions and its economic and social development, and on all political forces to work towards building political consensus on key issues for the country's future. We firmly condemn the use of violent means, such as the use of tear gas, to disrupt the functioning of Parliament.

The Council knows of our commitment to the consolidation of the rule of law in Kosovo, which must be pursued, as well as to the struggle against corruption and organized crime. We welcomed the significant development represented by the ratification of the territorial delineation agreement with Montenegro on 21 March, which was the result of a difficult process and will contribute to strengthening good-neighbourly relations at the regional level. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/407) also highlights the positive work done by the Kosovar authorities to further protect victims of sexual violence.

Lastly, France regrets that, since this past January, several incidents have cast a shadow on the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. My country calls on each party to refrain from any action or statement likely to provoke tensions and to try to resolve their differences through dialogue so as to create an environment sustainably conducive to the progress that remains to be made. The Serbian and Kosovar Presidents expressed their willingness to move forward towards the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. That commitment must be underscored. Despite difficulties that might arise, that path must be resolutely followed. France fully supports such a perspective and the work carried out to that end by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Mogherini.

We noted with interest the resumption of efforts by Kosovar authorities to draft the statute of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, which is one of the fundamental commitments provided for in the Brussels agreements. France believes that the comprehensive normalization of relations between the two countries is the only way forward for the two countries and their future generations and — as was recalled in the European Union strategy — a prerequisite for moving forward on their respective European paths.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Mr. Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his briefing. We welcome the presence and statement of Mr. Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia. I have also listened very carefully to the statement by Ms. Çitaku.

Tolerance, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence serve the fundamental interests of all ethnic communities in Kosovo and are necessary for achieving development. Currently, the situation in the Kosovo region continues to face complex challenges. China hopes that the parties concerned will always put the well-being of their people first, protect the legitimate rights and interests of all communities, refrain from actions and rhetoric that could escalate the situation and work together to safeguard the peace, stability and development of the Balkans.

Resolution 1244 (1999) provides an important legal basis for resolving the issue of Kosovo. All parties should act in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and, within the framework of relevant Security Council resolutions, seek a solution that is acceptable to all parties through dialogue and negotiations.

China respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, understands Serbia's legitimate concerns about the question of Kosovo and commends its efforts to pursue a political solution thereto. China welcomes the efforts of Belgrade and Pristina to continue to enhance dialogue. We hope that the two sides will reaffirm their firm commitment to a political solution, implement existing agreements, gradually build mutual trust, contribute their political will and wisdom and meet one another half way so as to create conditions for finding a lasting solution that is acceptable to all parties concerned.

The Security Council should maintain its attention on the question of Kosovo and encourage both parties to undertake sincere dialogue so as to promote a proper settlement of the Kosovo question. China supports UNMIK, under the leadership of Special Representative Tanin, in discharging its mandate and cooperating constructively with all parties. We hope that UNMIK, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force will work in close collaboration to play a constructive role in improving the situation on the ground and achieving a proper settlement for the Kosovo question.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We join others in expressing appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, Mr. Zahir Tanin, for his briefing on the reporting period. We also thank His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku for their updates. Today I wish to speak on five points.

First, there are still a number of sensitive issues left to be resolved, such as the lack of inter-community trust and a large number of persons still missing. An issue of some concern is the incident that took place on 26 March concerning Mr. Marko Đurić, Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of Serbia. We also note with regret that no progress has been made in the investigation of the January murder of Serbian activist Oliver Ivanović. Of equal critical importance is the protection of vulnerable groups, including Roma and Ashkali, and of cultural heritage and diversity in Kosovo.

Secondly, we commend steps taken by the parties under the auspices of Ms. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, to discuss the implementation of the agreements by way of holding a series of technical and high-level meetings in Brussels in February and March. We fully support her call for action to urgently establish the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities.

Thirdly, we would like to refer to women and youth. In that vein, the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, remains a matter of high importance. Special attention must be paid to the role of women as actors for peace and security. They need to be actively involved in political life and the decision-making process. There is also a need to implement resolution 2250 (2015), on youth, peace and security, and to provide full support and access to youth of all ethnicities to education and skills development to fulfil their potential. Young people have great power to prevent conflicts and to promote trust and peace.

Fourthly, we welcome the activity of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo during the reporting period, including the arranging of nearly 40 confidence-building measures to promote inter-community cooperation and trust, with the engagement of representatives of the Government, the opposition, civil society, women and youth, media and religious organizations in different parts of Kosovo.

Fifthly, we support the whole-of-pillar approach in Kosovo, since neither peace and security nor development can be achieved without good governance, the rule of law, criminal justice, institutional and human rights-related reforms, including the fight against corruption and organized crime. Above all, we highlight the importance of the nexus between security and development, the potential for which should be created through utilizing an innovative revamped regional approach and a more efficient, transparent and accountable modus operandi of the United Nations, delivering as One United Nations at Headquarters and on the ground.

Lastly, we believe that peace and stability in Kosovo could be achieved if the parties follow agreements, focusing on promoting inter-community dialogue and trust, mutual respect and understanding.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for the quality of his briefing on the situation in Kosovo. We also welcome Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku, Ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo to the United States of America.

I will focus my remarks on both the progress made and the challenges remaining in relations between Serbia and Kosovo since the previous report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/76). My delegation notes with satisfaction the ratification by the Kosovo Parliament, on 21 March, of the Montenegro border demarcation agreement, which is an important step in the normalization of relations between the two countries. My country appreciates the fact that the political parties have managed to overcome their differences despite the violent actions of some opposition parties in attempts to derail the process.

My delegation also welcomes the holding, on 23 March in Brussels, under the auspices of the European Union, of the high-level meeting between the political authorities of Pristina and Belgrade, as part of the political dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. My delegation hopes that that kind of meeting will continue to happen, in the interests of reconciliation and the final settlement of the Kosovo question. In that respect, Côte d'Ivoire would like to reaffirm its support for the continuation of the political dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo under the auspices of the European Union.

Despite some progress, my delegation remains concerned by the signs of continued tension between Belgrade and Pristina, including the arrest and subsequent expulsion, on 26 March, of Mr. Marko Đurić, chief negotiator and representative of Kosovo Serbs, from northern Mitrovica. My delegation urges Serbia and Kosovo to give priority to constructive dialogue and to refrain from any unilateral action that could jeopardize the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the two countries. My delegation also calls on them to observe good neighborly relations. In that regard, my country welcomes the mediation efforts of the European Union, whose representative, Ms. Mogherini, travelled to Belgrade on 27 March to meet with the Serbian leadership in order to discuss the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

My delegation also remains concerned about the slowness and lack of tangible results in the investigations into the 16 January murder of Oliver Ivanović, leader of the Civic Initiative "Freedom, Democracy, Justice". We recall the importance of consolidating the rule of law in the framework of the fight against impunity.

Turning to the situation in Kosovo, Côte d'Ivoire again calls for the implementation of the agreement establishing the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, which will undoubtedly be a major source of appeasement and easing of the sociopolitical climate. My delegation urges the Kosovo political authorities to demonstrate the necessary political will to remove all obstacles to the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

In conclusion, my country once again welcomes the work done by UNMIK to stabilize the situation in Kosovo and to bring the various communities together. My delegation urges Serbia and Kosovo to give priority to dialogue in order to find solutions to the problems that hinder their good-neighbourly relations, as both countries have the duty and the capacity to make the Balkan region a stable and prosperous region where their respective communities can live in peace and harmony with respect for their political, ethnic and cultural diversity.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Zahir Tanin, and his team for their work and objective assessment of the situation in Kosovo. The Mission continues to play an important role in the province. We also acknowledge Mr. Tanin's personal efforts. We also welcome the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić, to today's meeting. We agree with the Minister as he expressed serious concerns about the situation in the province. We also support the determination of Serbia's leaders to resolve all issues through civilized dialogue. We listened very carefully to Ms. Çitaku's statement.

According to our assessment, the situation in Kosovo is not only not stabilizing; on the contrary, it is deteriorating. Negative factors continue to accumulate. The situation requires constructive diplomatic efforts and strict international control, primarily through the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in particular since we understand that the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) has plans to leave the province.

No progress has been made to date in the investigation into the murder of a well-known Kosovo-Serb politician, Oliver Ivanović. Much time has elapsed since 16 January, the date on which the crime was committed. However, thus far we have heard no credible information about the results of the investigation. We are therefore left with the impression that the authorities in Pristina, after they tried and failed to put the blame on Serbia, decided to simply forget about the investigation. But the truth must be determined as soon as possible, and the Security Council must be apprised of it.

In addition to that tragedy, on 26 March there was another egregious incident in Kosovo and Metohija — the brutal, humiliating and violent arrest of the Director of the Serbian Government's Kosovo office, Mr. Marko Đurić. As a result of that staged and cruel provocative act, scores of people were beaten. That kind of unprovoked violence on the part of the Pristina's special forces calls into question the already fragile peace in the province. Bloodshed was prevented only because the Serbs behaved responsibly. Such lawlessness against Serbs in Kosovo illustrates a deplorable situation with respect to law enforcement and human rights. It is drastically different from the rosy, but virtual, picture painted by those advocating the independence of the province. In that regard, we are puzzled about the blatant permissiveness on the part of the international presence — the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the EULEX. They stood idly by, observed from the sidelines and refused to act to ensure to public order and safety.

We believe that that kind of intimidation against Serbs in Kosovo and the suppression of their determination to protect their legitimate interests is very dangerous and can lead to the resurgence of armed clashes in Kosovo. It could also destabilize the Balkans as a whole. The line chosen by Pristina serves only to inflame the situation and undermines the long-lasting efforts of the international community in the area of post-conflict settlement. We would like to address and call upon those with influence over Pristina to put pressure on those they support to de-escalate tensions.

Regrettably, we are witnessing exactly the opposite. Pristina believes it can act with impunity, with full permission to do so. Contrary to resolution 1244 (1999), it continues to prepare for the transformation of Kosovo's current security forces into a full-fledged army. It is being assisted by certain NATO contingents in KFOR, which by doing so go beyong the United Nations mandate. The closed Bondsteel base is being used for those purposes in particular. Kosovo-Albanian fighters are being prepared for active combat. We would like to warn the Council that, in the interest of peace and security in the Balkans, it is important to halt the creation of a force that hot-headed entities will employ against Serbs in the province.

We also have questions about the complete closure of the Bondsteel base. Its establishment was based on the importance of ensuring an international presence under the United Nations mandate, within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999). The international community has the right to information about the kind of military activity conducted at the base. Who is being trained there and for what purposes? What kind of exercises are being conducted? We believe it would be logical to include that kind of information in the quarterly reports about the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

We are also concerned about the information we received some time ago from NATO with regard to the fact that the KFOR command will halt contact with Russian representatives. What is being hidden from a permanent member of the Security Council by an international entity that is in Kosovo on the basis of the United Nations mandate? We hope that reason will prevail and that that erroneous decision will be reviewed.

The Russian position on Kosovo remains unchanged and is based on the international legal frameworks that are reflected in resolution 1244 (1999), which remains the cornerstone of the Kosovo settlement. We are of the view that the Kosovo issue can be settled only through politics on the basis of negotiations between parties in the spirit of goodwill and international law. Regrettably, we must acknowledge that dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has been discredited.

More than five years have elapsed since the Brussels Agreement was signed but the key obligation contained therein, which was reached under the auspices of the European Union, namely, the establishment of the community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, has still not been implemented. We bear witness to laxity on the part of the European Union, the international mediator. It did not compel the Kosovo Albanians to implement agreements achieved under their own auspices. As a result, Pristina openly undermines the implementation of its own commitments and refuses to abandon its own unrealistic demands. In contrast, we witness a constructive approach by Belgrade to tackle the Kosovo issue in the statement made by President Vučić citing his readiness to reach a compromise. At the same time, we are therefore concerned about increased pressure on the Serbian leadership and attempts to compel Belgrade to acknowledge the de facto independence of Kosovo. We hope that a Brussels dialogue will be spared such pressure and ultimatums. Failing that, we cannot expect to have success in the form of a long-term solution acceptable to all.

We believe it is untimely to push forward and link the so-called full and comprehensive normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina to an artificial timeline. First, we must fully implement earlier agreements, without which the already weak trust among the members of the negotiating process could disappear altogether. The implementation of the agreement concerning the establishment of the community of Serb-majority municipalities is at the centre of our attention.

We must note that no practical moves have been made with regard to Specialist Chambers in The Hague to investigate crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army. Eight years have passed since the publication of the Marty report on the issue. That is another serious problem. We believe that it is not constructive to delay the start of the work of that body under artificial pretexts. We expect that the Specialist Chambers will start its work in the very near future and be as transparent as possible. All those who committed terrible crimes, including trafficking in human organs, must face justice and be justly punished, regardless of their current positions. To replace Mr. Shwendiman, who retired on 7 May, American lawyer, Mr. Smith, has been appointed to the position of Prosecutor. We hope that he will quickly assume his post and finally produce tangible results in the form of specific indictments.

The rate of refugees and internally displaced persons to the region is also unsatisfactory. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/407), only three people returned to Kosovo during the reporting period. For some that truth is unpleasant, but it is still the truth.

Attacks on homes and property of Kosovo Serbs, arson, physical trespass and acts of vandalism continue. We must pay particular attention to ensuring proper protection for the Orthodox sites in Kosovo — churches and monasteries. We must also put an end to the destructive practice of denigrating sensibilities and humiliating Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo. We should not turn a blind eye to acute issues and problems, such as in the area of counter-terrorism and combating corruption and crime, but we must actually address them. The situation with regard to those issues is very worrisome.

In the current situation, the international community, with the leading role played by the United Nations and represented by the Security Council and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, should pay more attention to the situation in Kosovo and actively contribute to the maintenance stability and security in the region. Given those and other current circumstances, we consider the calls to reduce the frequency of reviewing the situation in Kosovo at the Secutiry Council to be completely inappropriate.

Allow me to remind those who ignore this fact that UNMIK was created by the Security Council, and only the Security Council has the authority to make relevant decisions in that regard. Unilateral statements are null and void.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the Western Balkans, with its rich history and potential, can, and should, become a region for cooperation and interaction, rather than tension and hostility. However, in order to achieve that, we must abandon the logic of confrontation and the practice of presenting countries in the region with the false choice of: Are you with or against us? As in many other parts of the world, what we need there is collective work on the basis of mutual respect. The Russian Federation stands ready for that.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Zahir Tanin for his briefing today. I would also like to thank Deputy Prime Minister Dačić and Ambassador Çitaku for their statements to the Security Council.

As others European Union (EU) members of the Council have already stated, the situation in Kosovo calls for a substantial reduction in the frequency of the reporting cycle. We should also refocus the efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) so that the means deployed by the United Nations are better tailored to the situation on the ground. To that end, we look forward to the strategic review of the Mission.

Kosovo's European perspective was reconfirmed in the European Commission's strategy for a credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced European Union engagement with the Western Balkans, which was adopted in February. The EU-Western Balkans summit, which will take place later this week in Sofia, will offer another opportunity for both sides to reaffirm their political commitment to advancing these efforts.

We welcome the progress made since our previous meeting (see S/PV.8176), in particular the ratification of the territorial delineation agreement with Montenegro by the Assembly of Kosovo, which represents an important breakthrough. We share the Secretary-General's assessment that the ratification is an indication of Kosovo's commitment to its humanitarian perspective.

Moving forward, it is now important to resume a dedicated reform agenda and to intensify the fight against corruption and organized crime. To that end, we encourage the Government and the opposition to engage in constructive dialogue to overcome political deadlocks and to enable the acceleration of necessary reforms.

It is also crucial that Kosovo's political leadership continue to respect the rule of law and human rights. In that regard, we are concerned over the recent arrest and expulsion of Turkish nationals without customary court proceedings, and we are concerned about the slow pace of progress in the investigation of the murder of Oliver Ivanović.

The continued deadlock in the normalization dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo must be overcome. The future of both lies within the European Union, and the normalization of relations is vital for a stable, peaceful and prosperous Western Balkans. We call on Pristina and Belgrade to implement their commitments and to inject new impetus into the dialogue process. As we have stated before, the status issue must not hamper Kosovo's European perspective or membership in international organizations.

Sweden welcomes the important work being undertaken on women and peace and security in Kosovo. That includes support to wartime survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and women's political participation. We reiterate the importance of the role of women in the normalization process.

The United Nations and UNMIK have made invaluable contributions to help bring Kosovo to where it is today. However, the EU integration process, including through the support of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, now provides the most appropriate framework to deal with remaining challenges. By continuing to work towards Kosovo's European perspective, with support from the EU and the international community, Kosovo's leaders can deliver on the expectations of their people for a better future.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

At the outset, let me thank Special Representative Zahir Tanin for his briefing. I would also like to thank Deputy Prime Minister Dačić and Ambassador Çitaku for their statements before the Security Council.

I would like to join my European colleagues in saying that we believe that the situation in Kosovo allows for a substantial reduction of the current reporting cycle. We furthermore believe that the Security Council must refocus the efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) so that the means deployed by the United Nations are tailored fully to the situation on the ground. In that light, Poland also reiterates the need for a strategic review of UNMIK. Twenty years have passed since the Mission's establishment and, in our view, it is time to reassess its relevance.

Poland has recognized Kosovo as an independent State and we have confidence in Kosovo's ability to resolve its problems. I will now briefly focus on three points.

First, I would like to stress the importance of the continuation of the European Union-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which should lead to a legally binding agreement on a comprehensive normalization of relations. Moreover, I would like to highlight that the decisions already made within the dialogue should be swiftly implemented. That is a prerequisite for both countries on their path to European integration.

The second point that I would like to make is on the importance of the rule of law. We stress the need for the Kosovo authorities to respect their obligations to support the work of the Specialist Chambers. We trust that they will continue to do so. We also note Kosovo's efforts to bring the justice system up to international and European Union standards. The law on courts and the law on the disciplinary responsibilities of judges and prosecutors, which were recently adopted, are important steps in that direction. The support in the area of the rule of law delivered in recent years by the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo was of the utmost importance.

Thirdly, and finally, let me welcome the ratification of the demarcation agreement with Montenegro. It is a crucial step towards visa liberalization with the European Union and towards further stabilization of the region. Let me conclude by saying that Poland regards Kosovo as being fully capable of managing its own future and exploiting its potential within the shared framework of European values.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Dačić has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Dačić (Serbia) (*spoke in Serbian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): I am not going to engage in polemics with Ms. Çitaku, as that is not my intention. In the first place, as I have already said many times, I would like these meetings to be constructive, and therefore, again, I will not comment on what she said — although I could do so, of course, as could she.

Moreover, I would like to add something to what I heard from the representatives of some of the countries present here. I am glad that the 10-year anniversary of the independence of Kosovo and the establishment of diplomatic relations was mentioned, particularly by the representative of the United Kingdom. But I would also recall that last year marked the one hundred and eightieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Serbia and the United Kingdom. The first British Consul to Serbia was George Lloyd Hodges, appointed in 1837. I hope that is also gratifying, in addition to the 10 years of diplomatic relations with Kosovo.

In addition, I would like to recall that next year we will observe 180 years of diplomatic relations with France, as ties were established in 1839. This year also marks 180 years of diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation, beginning in 1838. In 1881 — 137 years ago — we established diplomatic relations with the United States. In 1899 — 119 years ago — we established diplomatic relations with the Netherlands. I am referring exclusively here to the Kingdom of Serbia, not Yugoslavia. In 1917 — 101 years ago — we established diplomatic relations with Sweden. And we established diplomatic relations with Poland 99 years ago.

Therefore, I would like to recall that we are an old State with which Council members have traditional and friendly relations. In fact, as one exits the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office one can see a mural, erected after the First World War, that depicts Britannia with children representing Belgium and Serbia as the countries that made the largest contributions and had the largest number of victims in the war. We lost 40 per cent of our male population in the First World War. Consequently, I would ask the Council to consider those aspects when talking about our relations and our problems — all the more so considering that these issues are very difficult and painful to us.

I ask the Council to show greater understanding for our desire to be partners with every member. We have a long-standing tradition of diplomatic relations, several centuries. I also ask the Council to remember that history and what Serbia did for its allies in the First and Second World Wars. I do not want to delve too far into the past, as some might accuse us of dwelling there, but one cannot make plans for the future based exclusively on respect for Kosovo's interests. Serbia is willing to compromise, but that means respecting the interests of both sides.

Many countries in the world are facing problems similar to Serbia's. They are now reviewing their decisions to recognize Kosovo for those very same reasons — because they are now facing their own separatist movements. How can they recognize these principles in one situation and not in another? One could perhaps say that Kosovo is sui generis. Anyone can say that their case is sui generis. Moreover, this is not a fight for self-determination or freedom, because the Albanians in Kosovo are not a people who did not have a State of their own. They are a national minority that lived in Serbia. Albanians, as a people, have already exercised their right to self-determination by establishing a State of their own — Albania. The fact that diplomatic relations were such that Kosovo was recognized as an independent State does not mean that the same determination will prevail in, say, 20 years, when the same problems appear at one's door.

We do not wish conflict. Serbia is a serious country, an old country that shaped international order over several centuries for Christianity, for Europe and for the world at large. That must be taken into account when other countries are called upon to recognize Kosovo. I would never call upon other countries to violate any other country's territorial integrity. We would like to be partners with all countries, but partnership also implies that we should remember that in this country and in the United Kingdom 100 years ago, Serbian Day was observed during the First World War. I can bring a poster of that to the next meeting of the Security Council.

Has anything changed for the British people over the past 100 years? Probably, but the same thing happened in the United States. All of us here must be aware that these are not lies, but rather historical facts that can be researched. That is why, in Serbia, we will erect a monument to Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, who clearly defined the relationship of his country to Serbia — the largest victim of the First World War — as a country that was included in Wilson's 14 points and one that made a huge historical mistake by creating Yugoslavia and enabling others to break free from other occupiers. That is an error that we will have to pay for. I ask the Council to consider that.

The United Kingdom says that it is glad to commemorate 10 years since the independence of Kosovo, but I have not heard that Great Britain is gratified to have enjoyed 170 or 180 years of diplomatic relations with Serbia. The same is true of other countries as well. Serbia is the only country in the world that has a monument in honour of France. We love France as France loved us.

This is history. Some will say that history is not important. However, those that have a history cannot possibly say that; only those that do not have a history can.

The members of the Security Council have a history. I would therefore like to thank them for everything that they said — whether good or bad for us. Everyone has the right to choose their own future. We understand that there are no long-standing friends or enemies, but there are in fact long-standing friends. Do not break old friendships because of new ones.

The President: Ms. Çitaku has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Çitaku: I will try to be very brief.

First, many members of the Security Council raised the issue of the murder of Mr. Oliver Ivanović. On behalf of the Kosovo Government, I want to reiterate that we will leave no stone unturned until we find the perpetrators of that terrible crime. Mr. Ivanović was a citizen of Kosovo. He was among the few local Serbian leaders who spoke openly about Pristina as the capital of the Serbs living in Kosovo. He spoke openly against intimidation and the threat to which local Serbs were subjected by the authorities in Belgrade. We ask for the cooperation of all the parties. I hope that I will soon come to the Council with results.

Secondly, I need to reiterate that Kosovo's independence is not the product of a secessionist movement. Kosovo's independence is the product of the non-consensual dissolution of Yugoslavia — a union that no longer exists. I urge whoever has any doubts about the legality of Kosovo's independence to read the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/64/881). The opinion was clear and unambiguous. It is true that Kosovo is a very young State, but we are also a very old nation. We can point to any given date in history. We have always existed. We are Europeans and we are proud of the friendships and alliances that we have with all members. I hope that Kosovo will soon establish diplomatic relations also with Serbia.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8255

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8255th meeting

Monday, 14 May 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar (28 April to 2 May 2018)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar (28 April to 2 May 2018)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh and Myanmar to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the security Council shall hear briefings by the co-leads of the Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar from 26 April to 2 May, that is, the representatives of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Alotaibi.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I believe it goes without saying that first and foremost I would like to thank the Governments of Bangladesh and of Myanmar for their assistance and logistical support throughout our visit. The visit was short — somewhat of a whirlwind. Without the assistance provided with both Governments, the visit would never have been as successful as it was. I would therefore like to thank all the members that facilitated our mission, as well as my fellow co-leads. I will focus on the visit to Bangladesh.

On behalf of the Security Council, I would like to thank Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, who went to great pains to meet with us despite the fact that she had just returned from travelling abroad on the very morning of our meeting with her. In fact, the protocol services organized a meeting with her before she began her very busy day of work following her travel, That gave us an opportunity to hear Bangladesh's keen determination to find a solution to the Rohingya crisis.

On 28 April, the members of the Security Council arrived in Cox's Bazar to assess for themselves the tragic plight of the more than 1.2 million persons who are in need of humanitarian assistance. This is the most rapidly growing crisis of its kind in the world. Approximately 677,000 refugees from the Rohingya minority had joined the 300,000 others already displaced before the mass displacement of 25 August 2017.

We held two major talks: first with United Nations working group in Cox's Bazar and, secondly, with representatives of the Government of Bangladesh, represented by Mr. Mohammed Shahriar Alam, MP, Minister for Affairs of Bangladesh, and the personal representative of the Prime Minister. During that latter meeting, it became abundantly clear that the conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees were not yet in place.

The working group called for more international support in the Rohynga crisis. While the humanitarian response plan has been established, calling for funding in the amount of $950 million, only 25 per cent of it is funded.

The Council mission expressed its concern about potential regional repercussions caused by the refugee crisis and the sheer size and magnitude of the refugee camps. It was made abundantly clear to us that the issue of citizenship needed to be addressed before refugees and displaced persons could return to Rakhine.

Our meeting with the Foreign Minister and other senior officials of the Bangladeshi Government made it clear that they stood ready to continue to provide humanitarian assistance where they could and to do all they could to prepare the refugee camps to withstand the forthcoming monsoon season.

The members of the Security Council then held a meeting with the Prime Minister to take stock of the tragedy from the Bangladeshi perspective. We heard that the international community will continue to assist Bangladesh in its efforts to try to aid the refugees. On her part, the Prime minister of Bangladesh expressed her gratitude to the members of the Security Council, who throughout their visit voiced their support for Bangladesh. The Prime Minister underscored once again that she and her Government would continue to provide assistance to the refugees and displaced persons and do all they could to ensure that they could return in a voluntary and dignified manner when appropriate and safe.

We then visited a refugee camp, where Council members were able to see at first hand the scale of the tragedy besetting the refugees and displaced persons upon arrival at the border. We met with refugees and saw their conditions along the zero line demarcating the two countries. We saw many thousands of refugees and were able to see and hear for ourselves the sorry state of affairs of those who had lost their homes and, in the most tragic cases, members of their families.

The border guards of Bangladesh reported the arrival of a group of refugees, many of whom were injured, in recent days. The also shared with us images of victims who had obviously been injured by bombing and shelling before fleeing to the refugee camps. We also met local people who said that they were refugees from Myanmar having arrived earlier but with no national identity cards. They also reported that the Myanmar authorities were not upholding their rights, including those to freedom of movement, education, access to health care and employment — all of that, in addition to a national identity card, was being denied to them.

We then travelled to the largest refugee camp in the world — the Kutupalong camp, which hosts more than 600,000 refugees, half of them children. Council members met with victims of sexual violence, with orphans and with those who had fled scenes of their families being massacred and the razed remains of their villages. We heard first-hand accounts of the atrocities suffered by those people, and the horrors they had witnessed.

We also met with civil society and non-governmental organizations. Council members held two press conferences during our time in Bangladesh, in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka, where we answered questions from local and international journalists.

In my national capacity, I should now like to share a few observations and comments on the visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar. I promise to be brief, and will make further comments during the informal consultations scheduled to follow the present meeting.

First, we appreciate the cooperation provided by the Governments of Bangladesh and of Myanmar and all that they did to ensure that the Council's mission was a success. We look forward to enhanced cooperation between those two neighbouring countries to address and resolve the issue of Rohingya refugees.

We agree with the findings of the United Nations working group with regard to the potential widespread repercussions if the conditions in the camp deteriorate further. The Security Council must take measures to prevent the further exacerbation of the crisis and a deterioration of conditions, as they pose a direct threat to international peace and security. That is not only our own assessment but also that of the working group.

We encountered many women and children at the border. What made a true impression on me were the cries of those children who were still seeking their parents, having fled the violence in Rakhine state. Their sobs and cries will stay with me.

The Rohingya refugees shared with us that they had been refused national identity cards. We support their legitimate call for citizenship and recognition, and we call on the Government of Myanmar to address the issue beginning first of all with the question of citizenship being denied the Rohingya people.

The sheer scale of the destruction of villages in the north of Rakhine state shows that there were clear acts of organized and systematic violence targeting a minority that has committed no other crime than to be Muslim and a minority. We saw destruction, not just of a single house or three or four houses here and there, but large-scale destruction — the razing of houses and buildings. We think that, given the scale, it could very well amount to ethnic cleansing.

Those are the comments I wanted to make for the time being. As I said, I will make further comments and recommendations when we move to the informal consultations.

The President: I thank Ambassador Alotaibi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Meza-Cuadra.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important meeting on the recent visit by the members of the Security Council to Bangladesh and Myanmar. Peru considers it necessary for the international community and the Council follow the situation of the Rohingya Muslims in those countries with special attention.

As President of the Council in April, Peru had the honour of leading the visits, in conjunction with Kuwait and the United Kingdom. We would also like to acknowledge the role played by Poland, under whose presidency the trip we are reporting on today ended. It was a privilege to work with all of them. We owe special thanks to the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their warm welcome, to the United Nations country teams in both countries, to the Secretariat for its unflagging assistance and to the Government of Kuwait for its generous logistical support, which facilitated the execution of our ambitious programme.

Following the briefing by my colleague the Permanent Representative of Kuwait on the activities in Bangladesh after a brief visit to his country, I will report on the main activities carried out on 30 April in Naypyidaw. We had an opportunity to meet with Myanmar's most senior officials and to convey the Council's positions in line with presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, adopted unanimously by the Council last November (see S/PV.8085), as well as in line with the agreed terms of reference for the trip.

At our meeting with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she expressed her desire for a prompt return of the refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar before the monsoon season. In that regard, in her opinion, the process was being neglected due to complications with the required administrative forms. The State Counsellor stressed the importance for her Government of implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which is the second-poorest region in Myanmar. She recognized the need to draft legislation like the 1982 citizenship act, but indicated that the process would take time. The State Counsellor also pointed to the need to create a climate of trust between communities to facilitate access for humanitarian agencies. She noted that the focus on Muslim minorities had led to a perception of discrimination against other communities.

During the dialogue, the members of the Council expressed their willingness to support the Government of Myanmar both in the process of voluntary refugee returns and in addressing the root causes of the crisis. It was also stressed that the Government of Myanmar had to allow full access to the United Nations and humanitarian agencies and collaborate with the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The State Counsellor was also informed, among other things, of the urgency of respecting the human rights of the Rohingya community, of resolving the issue of their citizenship and of allowing independent investigations in order to provide for accountability for crimes committed, and thereby promote reconciliation.

We then met with General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, who argued that the violence in Rakhine state was generated by attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and affected all communities in that region. With respect to the role of the armed forces, he said that they protected the country from external threats under direction of the civilian Government. In response to allegations of human rights violations, he said the armed forces had respected their international obligations and that internal accountability processes had been followed.

Council members stressed the need to ensure security in Rakhine state to allow for the voluntary return of refugees, who are still afraid to return. In that regard, the importance of cooperation with the United Nations, including with the Special Envoy, and with Bangladesh was stressed. The need for transparent investigations and the establishment of an independent accountability mechanism supported by the international community to address human rights violations in Rakhine state were also noted.

Also on 30 April, we met with the members of the Committee for Implementation of Recommendations of the Advisory Board on Rakhine State, who presented various initiatives to promote the economic development of the region. With regard to the return of refugees, the members of the Committee stressed that they were working on the issue and that the problems encountered should be resolved in bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh. They also made reference to the negotiations taking place for a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. Finally, we also held important meetings with the United Nations country team and civil society organizations.

Peru notes with deep concern the dramatic situation of vulnerability of Rohingya Muslims in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. We also stress the need for the international community to intensify its attention and assistance to this humanitarian crisis. We must also underline the need for an independent and transparent mechanism to ensure accountability for the numerous allegations of human rights violations, including numerous cases of violence and sexual abuse. We support the initiatives and efforts undertaken in that regard.

Finally, we stress the importance of strengthening the rule of law and democratic transition in Myanmar with a view to building confidence in its institutions, reducing intercommunity tensions and promoting sustainable peace in Myanmar and the region.

The President: I thank Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Pierce.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): As this is the first time I personally take the floor this month, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming your new role. I would like to join my Peruvian colleague in thanking the Governments of Myanmar and of Bangladesh, but also our Kuwaiti colleague, for all the excellent arrangements for our trip. Without them, we would not have been able to cover so much. And like my Kuwaiti and Peruvian colleagues, we really did appreciate everything we saw through the United Nations teams on the ground and from the help we had from the Secretariat. If I can speak for the whole Security Council, I think all members found it a very productive and interesting, if difficult, visit.

I will speak about what we did on the third day, with our field visit to northern Rakhine. We had a briefing by the Chief Minister of Rakhine state, and we took a helicopter trip over northern Rakhine. We were accompanied by the Union Minister for International Cooperation, U Kyaw Tin, and the Chief Coordinator of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine, Mr. Aung Tun Thet. The members of the Security Council flew over an area that showed widespread devastation of land and villages. It was clear that they had been burned out.

We saw physical arrangements for return being prepared by the Government of Myanmar, including a reception centre and a transit centre at Hla Phoe Khaung, which was intended to accommodate up to 30,000 people. We met members of local communities in northern Rakhine. We had a town hall meeting with Rakhine Muslim and Hindu groups. We met community members who had seen their families become victims of attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). We also met a Rohingya community whose homes are being rebuilt by the authorities. We were also able to hold a meeting with members of civil society at Sittwe airport, although, unfortunately, our time was brief.

As my colleagues just did, I would now like to offer the Council some reflections on what we saw.

First, we saw the sheer scale of the devastation. I have only ever seen one camp like it before in my professional life. I was very struck by the magnitude of what the refugees face, as well as the Government and the United Nations as they try to return the people home. We saw widespread devastation from the air, and that was, obviously, one reason for the scale of the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Secondly, the Burmese authorities need to increase the scale of their response and allow the United Nations in with unconditional access to assist them. Only the United Nations has the technical expertise and know-how to deal with an event of that magnitude. Myanmar has two reception centres. Together they can receive, at best, 300 people a day. There are approximately 900,000 refugees. The scale is nowhere near what would be required to bring so many refugees home. As I said, the United Nations needs to be involved because it is the only institution in the world that has the ability to provide assistance at the scale required.

Thirdly, we did not receive enough information about the prospect for long-term solutions. Council members heard that refugees would be housed only temporarily in the transit centre, but there was no convincing explanation about how they would actually return to their villages and in what time frame. We noted that the camps for internally displaced persons in Sittwe had been there since 2012, and I think the Council was struck by that fact.

Fourthly, there must be emphasis on the physical arrangements and development, as opposed to the underlying political issues. Council members heard about the plans for the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine, which are privately financed, and about the physical arrangements for repatriation. I would like to make two points to that end though, if I may. There are risks to private financing, and anything delivered without Rohingya participation risks reinforcing displacement, not resolving it. I think that we accept that the Myanmar authorities are deeply concerned about development issues in Rakhine state as a whole, and the Council believes that it is one aspect that will need to be addressed. But it is not the foremost aspect in getting the Rohingya to start going back to their homes in safety and security. I was particularly struck again by the contrast between what is being offered on the ground in Myanmar and the scale of the problem.

There was little progress on tackling the political issues, as my two colleagues noted in the meetings they described. Many of those political issues were raised in the Annan Commission recommendations. They centre around community reconciliation, regularizing citizenship status of the Rohingya, human rights — such as freedom of movement and access to education and livelihoods — and holding the perpetrators of violence to account.

Again, we heard from some of the other villagers and officials about attacks on them by ARSA. Speaking in my national capacity, it is clear to me that there needs to be an accountability mechanism for all alleged violations and abuses of human rights committed in northern Rakhine. But again, I start from the point that it is the Rohingya that the Council went to examine, and they are overwhelmingly the largest part of the problem.

In recent days we have been very concerned by reports that Myanmar security forces threatened Rohingya villages not to talk openly with the Security Council delegation, and tolde them that the people who did so were now being looked for by security forces. It is obviously unacceptable that anyone should feel intimidated to speak to the Security Council, which, after all, undertakes these missions on behalf of the international community. I would be most grateful if the Myanmar authorities could clarify that as a matter of urgency.

I would like to make one last point in conclusion, if I may. I was very struck by the unity of the Council throughout the trip, and I think that my colleagues were as well. We would all like to find a way to preserve that unity as we go forward under your direction, Madam President.

The President: I thank Ambassador Pierce for her briefing.

On behalf of the Council, I should like to express appreciation to all the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat who participated in the mission for the manner in which they discharged their important responsibilities.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to join my colleague from the United Kingdom in congratulating you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. China also thanks you for convening this open meeting. I listened attentively to the briefings delivered by our colleagues from the United Kingdom, Kuwait and Peru.

With the concerted efforts of the Council members and in close consultation with the countries concerned, members of the Council recently visited Bangladesh and Myanmar. They held conversations with leaders, officials at various levels and the general public of both countries, where they also made field visits.

China deeply appreciates the reception the Council received by Bangladesh and Myanmar during its visit. The visit demonstrated the commitment and actions of the parties to resolve the issue through dialogue and cooperation, and set an example of unity and collaboration in the work of the Security Council. It played a positive role in the pursuit of a solution to the issue of Rakhine state. Through the visit, Council members gained an intimate and deeper understanding of the issue of Rakhine state, and its gravity and complexity.

Council members have all expressed concerns about the humanitarian situation of the displaced persons. At the same time, they saw the sincere efforts of Bangladesh and Myanmar to resolve the issue. Bangladesh has made enormous efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis, and the Government of Myanmar is ready for the return of the displaced persons. China has noted that, following the Council's visits, the countries concerned have made active efforts to further alleviate the situation.

The statement by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 May made it clear that the Government will sign a memorandum of understanding on the return of the displaced persons with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme as soon as possible. The State Counsellor herself visited Rakhine state. Myanmar has built transit sites and reception centres and settlement villages, and taken a host of measures to improve the conditions in Rakhine state.

Recently, the Government of Myanmar also sent a high-level delegation to Bangladesh to meet with the displaced persons and encourage them to return. The active efforts made by the countries concerned to launch the repatriation process should be fully recognized. Living conditions in Cox's Bazar could worsen in the wake of the imminent monsoon season. We must pay close attention and do everything possible to prevent a massive humanitarian crisis. The pressing task is to push for substantive steps by Myanmar and Bangladesh to implement the bilateral arrangement, facilitate the timely return of the largest possible number of displaced persons and credibly improve the humanitarian situation of displaced persons in Bangladesh. We hope that Myanmar and Bangladesh will resolve any issues that might arise in implementing the bilateral arrangement through bilateral dialogue and consultations. The concerted efforts of Bangladesh and Myanmanr to resolve the relevant issues are not only in the fundamental and long-term interests of both countries, but also in the interests of the countries in the region.

Going forward, the international community should increase humanitarian assistance to Myanmar and Bangladesh. United Nations agencies should step up consultations with the Governments of the countries concerned and sign the relevant memorandum of understanding as soon as possible. We should work together to move forward the early implementation of the bilateral arrangement to facilitate the return of displaced persons. Efforts should be made to create an enabling external environment for the countries to properly resolve the issue through the bilateral channel and ensure that it does not drag on, become increasingly complicated or escalate.

This past week, the Security Council's press statement (SC/13331) on its visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh reaffirmed the Council's firm commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of Myanmar. It welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding and the relevant arrangement on the return of displaced persons from Rakhine state between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh and the commitment made by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 May. It urged the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to step up consultations and cooperation and implement the bilateral arrangement as soon as possible. The Council should continue to encourage Myanmar and Bangladesh to ramp up consultations and cooperation for the early implementation of the bilateral arrangement.

As a friendly neighbour of both Myanmar and Bangladesh, China has been following the situation in Rakhine state very closely. We have been working actively in response to emerging issues and have provided emergency humanitarian relief for the proper settlement of displaced persons. The three-phase solution to address the issue of Rakhine state proposed by Wang Yi, State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, during his visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh in November 2017 has been endorsed by both countries, and its implementation is well under way.

China will continue to play a constructive role in seeking a proper settlement to the issue of Rakhine state, which involves a complex historical, ethnic and religious background. Its solution requires long-term efforts. The international community should play a constructive role in creating the external conditions needed for facilitating consultations and dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh, thereby resolving real problems, maintaining long-term stability and achieving prosperity and development for Rakhine state. Now is the time for action.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I congratulate you once again, Madam President, on your presidency. I thank our colleagues from Kuwait, the United Kingdom and Peru for their work in arranging the visit. I also thank the Governments of Kuwait, Bangladesh and Burma for hosting the Security Council.

It was absolutely critical for the Security Council to see at first-hand the crisis in Rakhine state and the challenges facing Rohingya refugees. One of the main reasons for the trip is the continuing disheartening response from the Burmese Government. Judging from the reaction of the Government and the Burmese military, it seems as though they have failed to acknowledge their role in the crisis. That is unacceptable and unsustainable if we are to make any progress in ending the violence in Rakhine state.

We are thankful to the Government of Bangladesh for everything that it has done to support the Rohingya refugee population and for its willingness to work with the relevant United Nations agencies to meet their needs. International support for humanitarian assistance to the refugees in Bangladesh is more critical now than ever before. We must continue to support them. More than that, we must have the will as a Council to do something now. Time is not on our side.

The monsoon season has already begun and is putting hundreds of thousands of refugees at further risk. We must continue to work with Bangladesh and United Nations agencies to ensure that the refugees have what they need as the rain begins to fall, while flooding the land beneath their feet and eroding the hills in which they shelter. We cannot allow the refugees to remain in unsafe and unsanitary conditions. The ultimate solution does not lie in Bangladesh. It is for the refugees to return to their homes and their own land. We, the Security Council, must remain focused on creating the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya people and of all displaced communities to their places of origin in Burma. We were glad to see some cooperation between the Governments of Bangladesh and Burma in achieving that goal, but the ultimate responsibility for creating such conditions rests squarely with Burmese authorities.

We appreciate the transparency of the Burmese Government demonstrated during the visit. However, Burma must do far more to accept its responsibilities and take the steps needed to end the crisis. Burma must work with the international community to focus on real solutions. That means focusing its energy on working with the United Nations and others to create the conditions on the ground that will reassure the Rohingya who fled that they will be safe to return in a dignified and voluntary manner.

Justice is an essential precondition for the voluntary return of refugees. It is important for Burma to cooperate with credible, independent investigations into reports of atrocities. There needs to be accountability for the perpetrators, including those in the security services. Impunity cannot continue to be the order of the day. As part of that effort, the Burmese Government should allow access to the United Nations fact-finding mission and restore access for the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma.

Burma must also demonstrate respect for the fundamental human rights of the Rohingya, including respecting their freedom of movement and freedom of religion. It must address the conditions that are causing people to continue to flee Rakhine state. Burma needs to do more to address the root causes of the crisis by comprehensively implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, including those related to citizenship.

Burma also needs to recognize the scope of the physical and logistical challenges involved in creating the proper conditions for the safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return for more than 1 million refugees. No country could handle that challenge alone, and Burma should accept the expert help that the relevant United Nations-mandated agencies have offered.

The United States stands ready to support Burma in addressing both the immediate crisis as well as a long-term solution. A democratic, pluralistic Government that protects the rights of all minority communities, including the Rohingya, is the only sustainable solution. As a sign of good faith, Burma should immediately sign the memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. Burma should also allow the United Nations and all other humanitarian partners immediate and unhindered access into Rakhine state. That is critical to building the confidence of not only the international community, but of the refugees.

As well, the Burmese Government should provide the media with immediate and unhindered access to Rakhine state, and provide for the protection of press freedoms, including the safety of journalists. We once again call on the Government of Burma to release the two Reuters journalists who remain jailed and on trial simply for reporting and documenting atrocities in Rakhin state.

The active involvement of the Security Council is essential to bring an end the Rohingya crisis. We know what we need to do. We cannot allow politics and short-term economic interests to keep us from doing what is right. We have unique tools to encourage Burma to take real steps towards resolving this crisis, and we must use them. We should move quickly to adopt a draft resolution that institutes real steps to resolve this enormous and growing humanitarian and human rights crisis. That, too, will be a challenge, as some members of the Council have kept us from taking action for cynical and self-interested reasons. Some undermine the unity of the Council demonstrated during the trip with unhelpful edits that only weaken the Council's message. We have all heard horrifying accounts of what the Rohingya people have suffered, what ethnic cleansing means to those on the ground. Now members of the Council have seen with their own eyes what the crisis has wrought. That leaves us with no choice but to act now.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to begin by thanking the co-leads for organizing this important and timely mission. Allow me to also thank the Governments of both Bangladesh and Myanmar for their cooperation, as well as the Secretariat and the United Nations country teams for their support.

The Council's visit allowed members to see for themselves the massive refugee crisis sparked by the widespread violence that has taken place in Rakhine state since last August, to hear at first-hand from those who fled the violence, as well as those who have remained in Rakhine, and to assess the situation in Myanmar and the possibility for voluntary, safe and dignified returns.

What the Council saw during its visit left an indelible mark. There was shock at the stories of the brutality suffered by the Rohingya. There was appreciation for the open and generous reception that refugees received in Bangladesh. And, there was alarm at the scale of the crisis and the response necessary. Ensuring the full implementation of the Council's presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22) remains relevant and urgent. The Council's visit demonstrated our determination to make sure that happens. The appointment by the Secretary-General of Christine Schraner Burgener as his Special Envoy for Myanmar is another step in that regard. We would like to express our strong support for the Special Envoy and her work.

The Council's visit serves to underline the need to remain seized of the situation and to increase our efforts to find a solution to the crisis. Several matters must now be urgently addressed.

First, we need to urgently respond to the needs of the refugees. We commend the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh and the communities hosting Rohingya refugees. As witnessed by the Council members, the immensity of the crisis means that they must have support to sustain the response needed. The upcoming monsoon rains will likely further exacerbate the difficult situation for the refugees. We encourage all States to continue and increase their support.

Secondly, we need to ensure that the conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns are created. It is clear that, for the process of returns to begin, conditions that allow for returns to be voluntary, secure and dignified, in line with international law and the principle of non-refoulment, must exist. It is essential that the root causes that led to the violence and displacement in the first place be addressed in full. During the Council's visit, it was clear that there exists an urgent need for security, reconstruction and livelihood programmes that benefit all communities in Rakhine. The implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State must be stepped-up, in close cooperation with international and regional partners, including seriously addressing the issue of citizenship.

Refugees told the Council that those who do decide to return voluntarily want to be able to do so to their place of origin. When conditions do allow for return, it is important to avoid setting up new internally displaced person camps or camp-like arrangements in Rakhine. Transition and reception centres need to be temporary. We encourage the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to expedite the ongoing bilateral consultations and efforts, and to implement the memorandum of understanding and agreement in a timely manner. International actors should continue to support the efforts to that end. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with its global mandate as the international refugee agency, must be associated with the process.

The stories Council members heard of sexual violence were harrowing. Particular attention must be given to the perspectives and special needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including protection needs in the return process.

Thirdly, United Nations access and engagement is essential. It is time for the Government of Myanmar to grant the United Nations, as well as other domestic and international non-governmental organizations, full and unhindered access to Rakhine state. We welcome the United Nations leadership on Rakhine under the Resident Coordinator. The memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and UNHCR should now be concluded as soon as possible. Access is also essential to support the implementation of the Advisory Commission's recommendations. In that regard, we welcome the renewed commitment to implement the Commission's recommendations and to work with the United Nations, as set out in the State Counsellor's press release of 1 May following her meeting with members of the Security Council.

Finally, numerous reports, including testimonies heard by Council members themselves, of systematic, widespread and coordinated acts of violence strongly indicate that crimes against humanity have been committed. Impunity for such crimes cannot be tolerated, and those responsible must be held to account. All States have a responsibility to address and prevent violations of international law, including human rights violations and abuses. In this case the primary responsibility lies with the Government of Myanmar, which must genuinely address the issue of accountability. Otherwise, the international community will need to assist and look seriously into the possible mechanisms available for that purpose. We are aware of the ongoing process at the International Criminal Court. Without true accountability, the trust needed for refugees to return will be hard to garner. We fully support the work of the fact-finding mission, which should be given full and unhindered access to do its work. Evidence-gathering at Cox's Bazar could also prove to be an important contribution.

The visit was a demonstration of solidarity with the refugees sheltering in the camps in Bangladesh. There was a strong and clear call from the refugees for the Council's ongoing support and action. We must not let them down. The visit also represented solidarity with the Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi host communities, whom we must continue to support. The visit also represented commitment to supporting the Government of Myanmar to create the conditions for return and to build peace and prosperity for all people in Rakhine state. We invite them to fully engage with the United Nations agencies on the ground and with other regional and international partners. Sweden stands ready to continue to support Myanmar on its path towards democracy and peace.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by warmly thanking Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for their efforts in organizing and conducting this mission, which was a particularly important moment for all of us. I also thank Bangladesh and Burma for their hospitality.

The field visits, in particular to the zero line, Kutupalong camp and northern Rakhine, and the various interviews allowed Council members to determine for themselves the severity of the suffering of the Rohingya, the extent of the destruction in northern Rakhine and the complexity of the crisis and the urgency with which it must be resolved. I should like to give an overview of what France took away from the visit and the priorities that we believe should guide international action, in particular by the United Nations, in support of Rohingya refugees.

In Bangladesh, we witnessed the admirable efforts and generosity of the Government and of the local population, which, in all, are hosting more than 1 million Rohingya refugees, who are particularly vulnerable and live in very precarious conditions. That exemplary hospitality must be sustained. We also noted that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and all the relevant United Nations and humanitarian agencies and organizations are doing an outstanding job in that regard. For France, the immediate strengthening of international support would mean action on three fronts.

First, the funding rate for the humanitarian response plan must be increased, as it remains well below that required to meet current needs. According to the most recent assessment provided by UNHCR, the rate stands at 16 per cent.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for appropriate measures and steps to be taken to meet needs and protect the Rohingya in order to prepare for monsoon-related security and health risks in refugee camps. Such measures, which the Government of Bangladesh has started to take, include the reinforcement and relocation of shelters.

Thirdly, we must continue to assist Bangladesh, humanitarian workers and local host communities in ensuring that the living conditions of the Rohingya refugees are as bearable as possible, while preserving the promising national goal of economic development for Bangladesh. It is essential that specific attention be paid to the needs of children, including with regard to education, and of women who have suffered unspeakable violence.

Interviews in Burma served to reiterate the expectations of the Security Council to civil and military authorities, which are very clearly expressed in the presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22). France's priority remains the full implementation of that statement. Commitments have been made, but that is not enough, as the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom just underscored. France therefore calls upon the Burmese authorities to take the following measures.

First, it is important to address the root causes of the crisis by fully cooperating with the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and by committing to implementing all of the recommendations in the Annan report. The Rohingya, whose nationality the Burmese

Government has withdrawn based on a law adopted in 1982, make up the largest group of stateless persons in the world. There can be no just or sustainable solution for their plight, or assurance of the rule of law in Burma, if they are not recognized as Burmese citizens and allowed to fully enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms. That will be achieved only when their citizenship is restored.

Secondly, the Burmese authorities must conduct investigations and prosecute those who commit systematic human rights abuses in Rakhine state, including sexual violence, and cooperate with the United Nations on the issue. The testimony heard by the members of the delegation on the violence and abuse suffered by the Rohingya is harrowing. The destruction observed in northern Rahkine state of homes, mosques and villages burned to the ground speaks for itself. The Rohingya are victims of ethnic cleansing; there is no other word for it. Prosecuting the perpetrators of such crimes is a moral, legal and political imperative. Starting today, the Burmese authorities can send a positive sign by agreeing to cooperate with the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission, establishing an on-site office of the High-Commissioner for Human Rights and cooperating with him.

Together we must also reflect on the best way to collect and protect evidence, which, when the time comes, will enable the perpetrators of such atrocities to be prosecuted in a fair and just trial with full respect for the law. France recalls that the forced displacement of people constitutes a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and we note that Bangladesh is party to it.

Thirdly, restoring immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access is imperative. It is essential that the Burmese authorities sign the memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme so as to demonstrate their commitment to respecting international standards on refugees. The onus is on the Burmese authorities to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees who, regrettably, are not all in the same location. Accepting technical assistance and expertise from the specialized agencies of the United Nations is the best way to achieve that goal. The challenges are real. Under no circumstances can inaction be justified. Specific commitments with regard to the points I just mentioned will serve to create the necessary conditions.

This year we mark the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which I recall was adopted following the genocide and massacre of the Second World War to prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy. Let me conclude by citing article 1.

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

I urge the Council to see reason and appeal to its conscience because the plight of the Rohingya underscores that respect for the most fundamental principle of the Charter of the United Nations is at stake. Its Preamble reaffirms faith in fundamental freedoms, dignity and the worth of the human person. The Security Council and we, the Members of the United Nations, are duty-bound to ensure respect for those principles.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking the three co-leads — the Permanent Representatives of Peru, Kuwait and the United Kingdom — for their detailed briefings on the Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar. I would like to express special gratitude to the Government of Kuwait for its generosity in providing flight arrangements and logistical support to the Security Council delegation. The mission would not have been possible without the joint efforts of the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar and of the United Nations country teams and other member States of the Council that worked very hard to make it happen.

On behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, I express gratitude to the host Governments for their assistance in organizing meetings with Government officials, as well as other stakeholders, including civil society representatives. It was a very special opportunity indeed to hold discussions with the highest authorities of both Governments on the issue of Rohingya refugees — the world's greatest and worst refugee crisis today.

The Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar was a vivid and stark revelation and an opportunity to obtain direct and first-hand experience of the true plight of the Rohingya people. Being on the front lines presented a glaring and shocking reality and awakened our conscience, prompting us to act more robustly and collectively.

During the visit to the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, we were able to witness a severe humanitarian catastrophe that affects the entire region. We would like to commend the Government of Bangladesh on its generous hospitality in receiving such a large number of refugees and providing them with shelter and other forms of assistance. We hope that the Government of Bangladesh, as well as the United Nations and other humanitarian partners, will continue to undertake monsoon-preparedness activities to mitigate the effects of the rains on refugees and prevent a high number of human casualties. That is especially relevant given that 60 per cent of the Rohingya refugees are children, including 41 per cent who are under the age of 12, and therefore particularly vulnerable to emergency situations.

We noted the efforts of the Government of Myanmar to find a solution to the issue of Rohingya refugees and its preparations for their repatriation. We understand that the crisis cannot be solved overnight and will be an arduous process that will demand the active participation of all stakeholders. Given the magnitude of the problem, the repatriation of refugees will be a most formidable task and will require concerted efforts on the part of many organizations, countries and actors. We therefore hope that the Government of Myanmar will continue to cooperate with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Gradually, other relevant United Nations agencies, international donors and partners should be able to lend the necessary support. We see the beginning of efforts by Myanmar and would encourage that they be directed at establishing the rule of law and good governance.

One of the most critical problems is ensuring the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in Rakhine state. As underlined by my delegation during previous meetings on the issue, there can be no lasting solution for the Rohingya issue without addressing the root causes of the crisis. They include primarily the issues of citizenship for the Rohingya people, the restoration of their rights and freedoms, poverty alleviation and development, access to education, employment and freedom of movement.

It is hoped that the visit by the Security Council will pave the way for closer cooperation and finding long-term solutions through truth, reconciliation and transitional justice, as occurs after every conflict. With the United Nations fact-finding mission at work, we realize that justice is a precondition for re-establishing trust among all communities and deterring future violence.

Unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the affected population is crucial. We hope that the goodwill created by the visit will result in unfettered and safe access to United Nations agencies offering emergency assistance and seeking to alleviate suffering, in particular of children, women and the elderly.

The Red Cross Movement, which has been providing humanitarian assistance in northern Rakhine at the request of the Government, cannot meet all the needs. We therefore call on the Government of Myanmar to allow full and safe access to Rakhine for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organizaiton, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies to effectively deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance.

We are encouraged by the commitment of the Government of Myanmar to working with the United Nations, and to endorsing and implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission in order to restore intercommunal harmony, sustainable peace, stability and prosperity. We are confident that the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, will bring new impetus for enhanced cooperation with the United Nations, and we hope that Naypyidaw will fully support the Special Envoy in discharging her mandate.

My delegation is committed to joining efforts to find a sustainable solution to the plight of the Rohingya refugees and people affected by the recent crisis and mass displacement.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, our delegation would like to express its deep gratitude and appreciation to Peru, Kuwait and the United Kingdom, through their Ambassadors Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Mansour Alotaibi and Karen Pierce, for the briefings they have just presented and for organizing the very important mission to visit Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Naypyidaw and Rakhine state. The mission enabled the members of the Security Council to see and hear first-hand the reality of the situation of the Rohingya refugees in the places we visited, through direct interaction with refugees, the political and military authorities and members of civil society and the United Nations system in Bangladesh and Myanmar. I would also like to place on record our gratitude to the Government of Kuwait for the important and helpful logistical support it provided to the mission, which went a long way to ensuring that it was carried out under good conditions and within the time available. We also express our appreciation to the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar and the United Nations system for all their support to the mission. I would also like to thank Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees, for his detailed and informative briefings during the mission.

While I do not want to sound too melodramatic, I have to say that what I experienced, observed and heard during our visit to the zero line, both inside Myanmar's territory and in Cox's Bazar, left a deep impression on me, as I had never seen first-hand a situation of human suffering comparable to that in both places, where hundreds of thousands of the more than 1.2 million refugees were crowded together like sardines in tins and in very precarious conditions with regard to health care, food and accommodation. Our exchanges with refugees and members of the United Nations agencies opened our eyes to the extent of the tragedy that these refugees have continued to endure since their departure from Rakhine state.

The humanitarian tragedy is not limited to the refugee population but is also having a broad impact on the people of Bangladesh who are hosting the refugees. Despite the fact that their meagre means of livelihood and their environment have been severely damaged, they have nevertheless the burden with grace and generosity. In that connection, I would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the people and Government of Bangladesh for taking that on and for the sacrifices they have made in spite of their own precarious situation. I would also like to take this opportunity to make an urgent appeal to the international community to support the Government of Bangladesh with all means necessary to address the critical situation that both its own people and the Rohingya refugees are facing, which threatens to deteriorate even further with the upcoming rainy season.

As we already mentioned in our talks with the political and military authorities of Myanmar, and in line with the Council's press statement of November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22), we would like to reiterate our call for every effort to be made to ensure the dignified return of all Myanmar citizens who have been forced to flee to Bangladesh. After what we have seen, experienced and heard, we in the Council must find better solutions so that the hope that our visit gave the refugees can be transformed into reality through ongoing contact with both Governments to facilitate the necessary agreements, memorandums of understanding, mechanisms and procedures for returning the refugees to the places they were forced to leave. In that regard, we hope that the Government of Myanmar will cooperate and resolutely support Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener, and will allow United Nations agencies access to every region of the country, especially Rakhine state, so that they can support the repatriation and resettlement process for refugees.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely thank all of the United Nations agencies and the staff of the Security Council Affairs Division for the effective support they provided throughout the development of the mission.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Security Council mission to Myanmar and Bangladesh was very timely and useful. Council members were able to personally assess the situation in Rakhine state and its surroundings, as well as the efforts that have been made to stabilize the situation. We would like to thank the authorities of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their efforts. We are also grateful to both the Polish and Peruvian presidencies, as well as Kuwait, without whose logistical support we could not have fully carried out our programme. It was extremely important that as a result of the mission, the Council was able to agree on a consensus press statement (SC/13331), which outlines the Security Council's position with regard to the crisis and the priority measures that the parties involved should take to overcome it.

We note that while the situation in the region remains difficult, in general it is under control. However, I would like to note the constructive attitude that Naypyidaw and Dhaka have shown in addressing this difficult situation, as well as their openness to dialogue and cooperation with the international community. All of us, without exception, have expressed our wholehearted solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh, who have been dealing with unprecedented humanitarian crises and challenges, and yet who have opened their doors and hearts to hundreds of thousands of people in dire straits.

I would also like to note that the Myanmar authorities did not try to conceal anything or avoid uncomfortable discussions. On the contrary, they demonstrated exceptional transparency. The Council was able to visit the most problematic areas and to talk openly with all parties, as I hope all my Security Council colleagues will confirm. The repeatedly expressed commitment of Myanmar officials to fully implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission led by Kofi Annan and the provisions of the bilateral agreement with Bangladesh on the return of refugees is also grounds for some optimism.

Separately, we should also to underscore the readiness of Naypyidaw to cooperate with United Nations humanitarian agencies and its partners, and the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme testifies to that. Another positive fact is the expansion of access to Rakhine state to foreign observers. We would also like to commend the Myanmar authorities' systematic efforts to deal with the area's socioeconomic problems. As I have already said, we greatly appreciate the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh in taking on a very heavy burden and hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from Myanmar in an extremely timely demonstration of solidarity. In that connection, the international community must provide appropriate support to the Dhaka authorities so that they can contain the acute humanitarian consequences of the crisis. Nor should we forget that Myanmar will also require similar support as refugees return. For its part, in 2018 and 2019 the Russian Federation will allocate resources to both countries through the World Food Programme. We believe that humanitarian assistance to forced refugees should not be provided by imposing political conditions but rather should in strict accordance with United Nations principles, as defined by General Assembly resolution 46/182.

First and foremost, we believe that this crisis must be resolved through bilateral negotiations between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Considering its scale, a rapid solution is unlikely. There are many sides to the complex and deep-seated problems in Rakhine state, which can be resolved only through exclusively peaceful political and diplomatic means, by establishing a dialogue between the Naypyidaw and Dhaka authorities and involving representatives of every faith and nationality.

The international community should focus on helping the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to find practical solutions. It will be very important to ensure that Myanmar and Bangladesh consider accusations of sexual violence and abuses of human rights in the legal arena, based not on statements in the media or on social media but on evidence that both countries must come up with. More than once during the Security Council's visit, the Myanmar authorities stated that they had no intention of ignoring such issues or protecting the guilty. In order to expedite the related legal proceedings, Naypyidaw has proposed that refugees submit their claims to the courts in Myanmar, and they are ready to closely coordinate efforts with Dhaka to do that. We believe that is a step in the right direction and would be a concrete, practical measure towards combating impunity that will need the international community's support.

Politicizing the refugee crisis should be avoided. Any attempts by external actors to exploit it in order to achieve unrelated political aims are unacceptable. It is important to help Naypyidaw and Dhaka to reach a settlement that takes their concerns into account, including with regard to fighting extremism and terrorism, and that was our mission's main task. It will be crucial to create conditions that will enable the safe and dignified repatriation of refugees to their homes, and we believe that will be possible only through the constructive involvement of the authorities of both States in the process. In our view, it is essential to offer assistance to the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in dealing with the Rakhine state crisis in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. We hope that all concerned will act responsibly and prudently in order to ensure that the crisis does not escalate once again.

We are all well aware that the situation in the region is extremely precarious and that monsoon season is right around the corner, which could complicate things even further. However, we believe firmly that the ground has been prepared for a successful solution to the crisis. We have Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, recently appointed as Special Envoy by Secretary-General Guterres, who must be given time to get things done. We have the understanding that Naypyidaw and Dhaka have expressed of the importance of joint efforts. Lastly, we have a unified Council, as expressed in our press statement. Bearing all of that in mind, I believe that in the course of the visit we were able to lay a pretty good foundation for the Bangladesh and Myanmar authorities to start actively resolving their problems with the concerned and constructive cooperation of the international community as a whole and the Security Council in particular.

I would like to underscore that to do that it will be important to cherish and strengthen the unity of the Security Council, which enabled us to agree on a press statement fairly quickly. I hope that all Council members understand that and will not be tempted to use the situation to pursue their own domestic political aims. That would definitely not help to resolve the refugee crisis.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for their briefings on our joint Security Council visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar, and to join others in thanking them for organizing and co-leading the visit. We were also glad to do our part during the March presidency of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to facilitate discussions to make the visit to both countries possible. It provided an opportunity to assess the progress made in implementing the Council's November presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) and to inform the Council's further engagement. We are grateful to the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their hospitality and willingness to engage with the Council. I would also like to warmly thank all the United Nations staff who were involved in organizing the visit and producing the briefings. I would like to address three aspects of the issue, starting with the impressions we had from the visit; secondly, the immediate steps to be taken; and thirdly, the urgent need for accountability for crimes against the Rohingya.

The visit left a deep impression on us all. We were particularly shocked by the scale of the crisis, the number of refugees and the extent of the destruction of their villages. In Cox's Bazar we heard horrifying accounts from survivors of the violence. We met a woman holding a 16-day-old baby who looked as if she did not know what to do with it. She had been raped the night that her husband was killed and did not know who the baby's father was. We met an elderly woman who saw members of her family being raped and was then raped herself. We met a girl aged seven or eight with deep scars on her skull inflicted by knives and cuts. Imagine doing that to a child. We met a girl about 12 years old whose upper thigh had been ripped open by a bullet and who was now paralysed and unable to go to school. We met children who had no dreams for the future, just the past to deal with. Several of them had lost their parents and had to cope with that alone.

We also witnessed the hospitality of the people and the Government of Bangladesh in hosting almost 1 million Rohingya refugees. Their generosity deserves our deep appreciation and support. At the same time, with the monsoon season almost upon us, the challenges in the camps should not be underestimated by any of us. Swift action is required to prepare the camps for the imminent possibility of floods and landslides. The United Nations joint response plan is seriously underfunded. It is therefore essential that the international community step up its aid.

The second aspect is the immediate steps to be taken. Coming back from the visit, we cannot conclude other than that the outlook for a swift solution to the crisis remains bleak. Much needs to be done before the Rohingya can return safely and in a voluntary and dignified manner. The Council's presidential statement of November, which was reaffirmed in a press statement (SC/13331) following the visit, is far from being implemented.

Quick steps can be taken to show that Myanmar is truly committed. We call on the Myanmar authorities to allow full access to the United Nations and humanitarian organizations. The swift conclusion of talks on a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme would be an encouraging first step. Furthermore, initial efforts to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State — the Annan Commission — need to be followed up with meaningful and concrete steps — steps towards recognition, protection and citizenship for the Rohingya.

The third aspect is the need for accountability. For every member of the Rohingya community with whom I spoke, justice featured high on their list of needs for them to feel safe enough to return. Without addressing the crimes committed against the Rohinyga, the decades-old cycle of violence and discrimination cannot be broken. We welcome the expressed commitment of the Myanmar authorities to facilitate independent and credible investigations.

As a first step, we call on Myanmar to allow access to the fact-finding nission, as well as to the Special Rapporteur. Furthermore, we call on Myanmar to become a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court or to accept the jurisdiction of the Court in accordance with paragraph 3, article 12, of the Rome Statute. We hope for swift and decisive action in that regard. Otherwise, it will be up to the international community to shoulder its responsibility and to consider further steps to bring about accountability, including referral to the International Criminal Court.

The visit has made it clear to all of us that the continued engagement and support of the international community is needed, including through the newly appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The Kingdom of the Netherlands stands ready to play its part and to support the decisive engagement of the Council through a draft resolution that reflects the large scale of the crisis.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

Allow me to start by thanking our colleagues the Ambassadors of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for their very comprehensive briefings and for their efforts in organizing the visit. I would also like to express my gratitude to the authorities of Kuwait for their generosity and for facilitating our mission, and to the authorities of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their hospitality.

The Security Council visit to the region should really be seen as the success of the two or so previous Council presidencies. Thanks to their commitment, we were able to witness the humanitarian situation on the ground. What we saw in Cox's Bazar was a true eye-opener. The scale of the crisis is horrifying, and it will not change in any way for the better during the monsoon season. There is a race against the clock in the refugee camps, and we are collectively losing it.

We believe that the Council's visit can serve as a trigger for more robust Council action. Council members are obliged to take action and to respond with concrete solutions followed by thorough financial and material support for not only the refugees but also the host communities in Bangladesh. In that regard, I want to thank the authorities of Bangladesh and the host communities for their efforts in easing the heavy burden of the Rohingya refugees.

We call on the Myanmar authorities to grant full and unhindered access for United Nations agencies to Rakhine state and to develop close cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. We further call for Myanmar to commit to addressing the recommendations of the Annan Commission.

Lastly, we hope that after voluntary repatriation, the Rohingya community will be properly reintegrated into society with unrestricted access to health-care services and basic education for all, including women and children.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Madam President, on Poland's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We have full confidence in your wisdom and able leadership. I assure you of our full support and cooperation.

My Government welcomed the visit of the members of the Security Council to Myanmar in the hope that the visit would help them to better understand the situation on the ground so that we can further strengthen our cooperation with the United Nations in our efforts for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the displaced persons. We believe that we will be able to overcome the serious challenges that we face today by working in partnership with the United Nations. We trust in its constructive engagement and cooperation based on the principles of objectivity, mutual respect and understanding. We also hope that the visit will give strong impetus to our bilateral efforts with Bangladesh for the implementation of the repatriation process.

We facilitated the Security Council's visit to the fullest extent possible within the available time frame of the Council. The State Counsellor saw the visit as an important turning point. She reaffirmed the commitment of the Myanmar Government to bringing about peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

In resolving the current issues relating to Rakhine state, we all agree that the most urgent task right now is to start the repatriation of the displaced persons in accordance with the bilateral agreements. We have repeatedly stated that we want to start the repatriation process as soon as possible, as we are ready to receive the returnees. Recently, on 8 May, the Ambassador of Bangladesh to Myanmar, Mr. Manjurul Karim

Khan Chowdhury, was summoned to Nay Pyi Taw and reminded of Myanmar's readiness to commence the repatriation of verified displaced persons before the monsoon, as agreed by the two Governments. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs once again urged Bangladesh to implement the bilateral agreement and to repatriate those who are already verified so that they can return to their villages in Rakhine. The Ambassador was also reminded to send the lists of displaced persons, using the right forms, as agreed in the physical arrangement for repatriation.

The forms used by Bangladesh were not those prescribed in the physical arrangement. They did not contain the signatures, fingerprints and proper photographs necessary for the proper verification and assurance of consent. We had already requested the Bangladesh side, on three separate occasions through diplomatic channels, to forward the duly completed prescribed forms that would enable displaced persons to be repatriated under the principle of voluntary, safe and dignified return.

Prior to the Security Council visit to Myanmar, the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar visited Cox's Bazar refugee camps and met with the displaced persons. He explained the resettlement programme for returnees to them and provided information on the repatriation process. To our surprise, they were not at all aware of the repatriation process. Apparently, they had not been notified by the Bangladesh authorities about the current bilateral arrangements or provided any of the forms required for the repatriation process. During the visit, the Minister could not meet the persons whom we have verified for repatriation, despite our request that such a meeting be arranged.

While we are trying to solve the issue in good faith through bilateral cooperation, it is most regrettable that, instead of fulfilling its commitment for the repatriation of the displaced persons as per the bilateral agreements, the Bangladesh side has deliberately made one excuse after another to stall the repatriation process. Bangladesh has been distorting the facts and telling the whole world that Myanmar is not willing to accept the return of the displaced persons. Bangladesh is altering the truth and vilifying the Government and the people of Myanmar to solicit international condemnation and exert maximum political pressure on Myanmar. We need the full and sincere cooperation of the Government of Bangladesh if the repatriation process is to be successful.

In that connection, I would like to refer to the remark made by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait concerning the illegal occupation on both sides of the international border. Human habitation and the building of any structure within 150 feet of the international border is prohibited by our bilateral border agreement. We have therefore filed our objection with the Bangladeshi side regarding the construction of bunkers and houses in the restricted areas on their side of the border. We have also learned that the Bangladesh side is helping illegal occupants on our side of the border in building shelters, which is a violation of Myanmar's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We notified them that such actions should cease immediately.

Allow me to turn to the matter of accountability. The Government of Myanmar has stated time and again that no violation of human rights will be condoned. Allegations supported by evidence will be investigated and action taken in accordance with the law. You may recall, Madam President, that, during your meeting with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she condemned all violence and reassured you of our readiness to take actions on the alleged human rights violations in Rakhine if the necessary information is provided. She reiterated that security assurances would be given to anyone who wishes to bring to court in Myanmar cases regarding violations of rights.

Moreover, the Commander-in-Chief also told the members of the Council that the Tatmadaw would welcome any alleged survivor of sexual violence who could bring hard evidence of the crime committed so that the perpetrators can be held accountable. He also mentioned that the Tatmadaw has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against any sexual violence committed by members of the armed forces.

When it comes to human rights abuses and violations, we should not forget the fact that the current humanitarian problem was the result of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) terrorist attacks on 30 border guard posts in northern Rakhine. The root cause of the latest crisis and the brutal killings and atrocities committed by the terrorists on innocent ethnic Hindu, Rakhine Buddhists and other minority tribes had been ignored by the Western media. The truth has been suppressed by incessant sensational arguments and Muslim victimhood narratives. Only a balanced and constructive approach can lead us to the right solution of the extremely complex and politically sensitive problem of Rakhine state.

During the Security Council visit to Maungdaw on 1 May, approximately20 Rakhine, Mro, Maramar and Hindus waited for the Council members at the township administrative office for an opportunity to testify as to their experience of ARSA terrorist atrocities. Due to the limited time, only one Rakhine woman and one Hindu woman were able to talk about human rights abuses and atrocities perpetrated by ARSA terrorists. Sadly, many tragic stories of the ethnic people in Rakhine have fallen on the deaf ears of some who wanted to listen to only one side of the story of their choosing.

Those people witnessed the atrocities committed by ARSA terrorists, including the killing of seven Mro ethnic people in Khon-Taing village of Maungtaw township on 28 August 2017 and the subsequent torching of 2,625 houses in the area. They also testified as to the horrific discovery of a mass grave found near Yebawkya village on 28 September 2017, where 45 bodies of Hindus were discovered among the hundred kidnapped by ARSA. Those ethnic people in Maungtaw area are traumatized by these brutal terrorist acts. They all feel insecure as minority groups in their own land as a result of the fear instilled by ARSA. ARSA must also be held accountable for atrocities committed against the civilian population in Rakhine. The investigation of violations must include cases of terrorist atrocities as well.

We are seriously concerned that Bangladesh is unwittingly allowing extremism to rear its ugly head in that part of the region. ARSA already has a foothold in the camps, which soon will become a stronghold of terrorism and extremism. Recently, on 9 May, a group of four to six terrorists entered one of the refugee camps in Balukali and dragged 46-year-old Mohamed Faisal Ulhaq out of the camp and stabbed him to death. He had reportedly been advocating returning to Rakhine among his fellow displaced persons.

We have made every effort to put in place an environment conducive to the return of displaced people. Convinced that the engagement of United Nations agencies in Rakhine will strengthen our ability to ensure safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation, we are in the process of active discussions on a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Those agencies will be working alongside Myanmar ministries concerned and the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development for the good of all communities in Rakhine.

At the same time, we shall also be dealing with the root causes of the recent violence. The recommendations of the Annan Commission set out practical measures necessary to achieve development for all communities in Rakhine. Of the 88 recommendations by the Annan Commission and the 48 by the national investigation commission, many overlap. Fifty-seven will be fulfilled very soon, while 31 are still being processed. The first report of the Implementation Committee was issued in February 2018, and the second will appear in May. Since the submission of Mr. Annan's final report, three camps for internally displaced persons have been relocated, and another four will be closed very soon.

With regard to the issuance of national verification cards, false information has been spread to discourage people from complying with requirements in that regard. In reality, cards constitute the first step for citizenship verification. Card holders who meet requirements in accordance with the existing law will become Myanmar citizens within a few months. All persons residing in Myanmar have to go through the same process of verification, myself included.

We will continue to implement the recommendations of the Annan report at the fullest extent, in keeping with the situation on the ground, to bring long-term peace, harmony and development to the people of Rakhine.

The international community, including the United Nations, should work together to create an environment conducive to restoring peace, harmony and development for all people in Rakhine state. Hate narratives that promote deep-rooted mistrust must stop. The prevailing hostile attitude towards the Myanmar Government will not contribute to building peace and harmony in the country. We have just heard a few very hostile and hateful remarks with respect to my country. That is very unfortunate. Discriminatory treatment and one-sided support will lead only to further polarization and escalation of tensions among different communities in the region.

Bangladesh must cooperate fully and sincerely with Myanmar in the implementation of the bilateral agreement for the repatriation of displaced persons. We are confident that we will be able to resolve the present humanitarian problem and the issues of long-term peace and development of Rakhine state if Myanmar and Bangladesh work hand in hand in a spirit of mutual respect, genuine desire to help the displaced persons and a spirit of good-neighbourliness. In that connection, I am pleased to inform the Council that the joint working group for the repatriation of the displaced persons will meet in Dhaka on 17 May to expedite the implementation of the agreed repatriation process.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation to the members of the Council that have been extending their support to Myanmar at this challenging time of transition to democracy. We also thank our four neighbours for accepting our invitation to travel to Myanmar with the Council members. We believe that mutual understanding and constructive cooperation will ultimately bring about the positive result to which we all aspire.

I would like to reassure the Council that, notwithstanding all the daunting challenges we are facing, the Government of Myanmar will spare no effort to bring peace, harmony and development to all people in Rakhine state.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this briefing and for giving us an opportunity to take the floor.

We appreciate the efforts made by the Security Council to visit Bangladesh and Myanmar to witness at first hand the evolving Rohingya humanitarian crisis. It has been generally acknowledged that the visit left indelible impressions on those who were part of the team. The Council reaffirmed its custodianship of this issue through its meaningful engagements and pronouncements during the visit. We thank in particular the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for leading the visit and for their respective briefings this afternoon.

Our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reaffirmed Bangladesh's steadfast commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and to remaining engaged with Myanmar in good faith to implement the bilateral agreements concluded between our two Governments. Yet, mindful of the limits of our bilateral engagement with Myanmar under the present circumstances, the Prime Minister and other dignitaries conveyed four expectations to the Council, which I now paraphrase: first, continued and decisive action to ensure the safe and sustainable return of the Rohingya; secondly, adoption of a Security Council draft resolution building on the presidential statement adopted last year (S/PRST/2017/22); thirdly, prevailing on Myanmar to unconditionally implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State; and, fourthly, ensuring accountability and justice.

We note that the Council's press statement adopted following the visit (SC/13331) makes reference to some of those issues. For those of us used to the dynamics of the intergovernmental processes at the United Nations, it may be somewhat comprehensible that a consensus-based press statement can be circumscribed in its aspirations. However, it is difficult to explain such dynamics to the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who unequivocally voiced their concerns and expectations to the visiting Council members.

We are aware of the Council's scheduled programme to hold consultations immediately after this briefing. I shall therefore limit myself to making four specific points.

First, there should not be any doubt that the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the Rohingya to their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state is an objective shared among all Member States. But voluntary repatriation does not only entail the formation of a few high-profile committees without any demonstrable outcome and the erection of some reception centres almost in the middle of nowhere. In their briefings, the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait and the United Kingdom clearly alluded to the prevailing uncertainty. The issue of incomplete forms shared with the Myanmar side is but one manifestation of that.

The Rohingya need to get concrete answers to some of the fundamental questions about the Myanmar authorities' immediate-to-long-term plans with regard to their citizenship, freedom of movement, human rights and socioeconomic development. It would facetious to claim readiness for repatriation to start at the soonest while there is no plausible response yet for the ways the Rohingya can be assured of an end to their systematic persecution, dehumanization and dispossession in Myanmar. The aerial views of large tracts of burned villages and obliterated homes in nearly 400 villages in northern Rakhine state hardly evoke confidence among the Rohingya about the prospect for return to their homes in Rakhine state. On their behalf, the relevant United Nations agencies should be able to vouch for a situation conducive to their safe, dignified and sustainable return.

It is crucial that the provisions of the bilateral arrangement between the Government of Myanmar and the relevant United Nations agencies are transparently shared with the Rohingya and other affected communities. It is crucial that the 4,000 to 5,000 Rohingya taking shelter along the border, which Council members witnessed, be repatriated and that the existing camps for internally displaced persons be dismantled in order to generate confidence among the Rohingya regarding their safe and dignified return.

The Myanmar Minister for Social Welfare, during his visit to the camps in Cox's Bazar, added to confusion among the Rohingya about prospects for their so-called resettlement and verification. It is also worth noting that the Myanmar side refrains from mentioning the real ethnic affiliation of those it has claimed to have verified. It is typical of the Myanmar authorities to shift the blame by twisting narratives. It is unfortunate that the Permanent Representative of Myanmar continued that trend today regarding the question of developments along the border. He also shared some fabricated narratives about the presence of terrorists and violent extremists in the camps, which could be considered evidence of the ongoing attitude of the Myanmar authorities towards the forcibly displaced Rohingya.

Secondly, the international concern over the impending monsoon and its potential adverse impact on the forcibly displaced Rohingya is indeed timely and useful. We shared with Council members a brief account of the preparedness measures undertaken so far. In addition to the 5,800 acres of land allocated for the Rohingya so far, our Government has allocated 500 acres for the relocation of extremely vulnerable members of the group. The Government is in the process of finding more land for safe relocations, and the local administration remains seized with that issue. A total of 480 Rohingya have been trained as volunteers by the cyclone-preparedness programme for emergency response.

Thirdly, on the question of accountability, we hear the voices being raised loud and clear. We are following with interest the request by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for a ruling from the Court's Pre-Trial Division on the ICC's jurisdiction over the forced deportation of the Rohingya to a State party to the Rome Statute. In view of the obstruction being faced by the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur and the fact-finding mission, there is a suggestion gaining ground in favour of setting up a so-called triple-I mechanism — an international, impartial and independent mechanism — to undertake an independent and impartial investigation and gather evidence in a coordinated fashion.

It is evident that the Rohingya have a legitimate demand for breaking the culture of impunity as a critical confidence-building measure. My Council colleagues who visited the camps recently will perhaps recall the numerous lost, traumatized and emaciated faces they witnessed on people holding placards and banners calling for justice and accountability for the egregious crimes committed against them. We believe that they would have listened to the Council today about the Myanmar authorities' invitation to submit allegations of crimes committed against them to Myanmar courts. However, that invitation raises the question of how the Rohingya would be able to gain access to the judicial system in Myanmar when the issue of their citizenship remains unresolved.

Fourthly, and lastly, it is perhaps high time for the Council to consider working towards a resolution on the situation in Myanmar. The way the crisis has evolved so far makes it abundantly clear that the Council should remain engaged with this issue on a regular and periodic basis. The Myanmar leadership has reportedly underscored the need for time to address the underlying root causes of the crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine state. The Council should certainly recognize the importance of having a resolution to accompany Myanmar in that process, including by voicing its support for the work of the Secretary-General's newly appointed Special Envoy on Myanmar. We urge Council members to seriously reflect on this possibility during its consultations later this afternoon.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.